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by
punco
godyn

A naked man in a city street — the track of a horse in volcanic mud — the mystery of reindeers' ears — a huge, black form like a whale, in the sky, and it drips red drops as if attacked by celestial swordfishes — an appalling cherub appears in the sea —

Confusions.

Showers of frogs and blizzards of snails — gushes of periwinkles down from the sky — The preposterous, the grotesque, the incredible — and why, if I am going to tell hundreds of these, is the ordinary so regarded?

*-Charles Fort,
Lo!*

In one of my favorite episodes of *The X-Files*, Mulder and Scully are walking in a rainy woods when they are suddenly pelted with a rain of frogs. It's a great moment, and I took a particular thrill in it. Confusions, I whispered to myself.

Years before Mulder and Scully, years before Project Blue Book, years before the term "UFO" was coined, a man by the name of Charles Fort spent years in the New York Public Library poring over newspapers and scientific journals for bits of the unexplained. Carefully recording each "lost quasi-soul of a datum," Fort would go on to compile his observations into four bizarre books, *The Book of the Damned*, *Lo!*, *Wild Talents*, and *New Lands*, written between 1919 and 1932. Those stories have found their way into a number of contemporary sources, and Fort launched generations of interest in the abnormal swimming amongst the "explained."

I first came across Fort in college at a used bookstore, where a lurid-looking paperback of *Lo!* would draw me into the Fortean world, where a paranormal realm of an "underlying oneness" plays a coquettish dance with the human need to pigeonhole and explain away.

It was Fort's feverish writing style that captured me, however, and I would breathlessly read him to friends. It resulted in one girl covering her face in fear every time I produced the tome, which I had lovingly put in a leather book-cover. She referred to it as "that devil book with the cover made of human flesh."

Fort's vision is one where men of reason continuously scramble to explain the unknown in "common" or "ordinary" terms, constantly backpedaling. He noted that at one time, stones falling from the sky were accepted, during the "dark ages," and then refuted during the age of "reason." But when meteors were discovered, it was again apparently OK to believe again in rocks falling from the sky.

Among his catalogue of creepy precipitation and other whatnot, there are several references to oddities appearing and disappearing in New England, including some in Western Massachusetts. In Worcester, there was a rain of periwinkles; in an unidentified Bay State location a San Francisco paper reported an 1892 Valentine's Day mass of "myriads of unknown scarlet worms ... not seen to fall from the sky, but found, covering several acres, after a snowstorm." Six years before that, there was an unidentified monster in the waters of the Connecticut.

What follows are four more detailed examples of Valley Fortean.

The Airship of Venus

Lights in the sky, variously described as airships, balloons, or the planet Venus, make the rounds through Fort's books, and one glowing overnight traveler made its way through the region during the week of Halloween 1908.

According to the *New York Sun*, a pair of undertakers in Bridgewater said they were up at 4 a.m. Oct. 31 and saw "something like a searchlight. It played down upon this earth, as if directed by an investigator, and then flashed upward. 'All of the balloons in which ascensions are made, in this State, were accounted for today, and a search through southeastern Massachusetts failed to reveal any further trace of the supposed airship.'

"It is said that 'mysterious bright lights,' believed to have come from a balloon, had been reported in many places in New England. The week before, persons in Ware had said they had seen an illuminated balloon passing over the town, early in the morning. During the summer such reports had come from Bristol, Conn., and later from Pittsfield, Mass., and from White River Junction, Vt."

No balloon was found.

The Disappearance of Capt. James

Not as mysterious by today's standards but certainly a matter of excitement at the time was the 1919 disappearance of Royal Air Force Capt. Mansell R. James, a W.W.I. ace whose Sopwith Camel vanished somewhere over the Berkshires. James had been flying from Boston to Atlantic City, when his luck apparently ran out somewhere on the leg of the flight between Lee and Mitchell Field, Long Island.

He had left Lee May 29 around 11 a.m., without a compass, after sending a telegram to the Air Congress Contest Committee in Pittsfield. He had been hoping to compete for an "Ace of Aces" trophy for the first person to reach Toronto from the shore. He said that he would follow the Housatonic south to Long Island Sound.

But, Fort wrote, "over the Berkshires, or in the Berkshires, he had disappeared. According to later dispatches, searching parties had scoured the Berkshires, without finding a trace of him.

"Upon June 4, army planes arrived and searched systematically. There was general excitement, in this mystery of Cap. James. Rewards were offered; all subscribers of the Southern New England Telephone Company were enlisted in a quest for news of any kind; boy scouts turned out.

"Up to this date of writing there has been nothing but a confusion of newspaper dispatches: that two children had seen a plane, about thirteen miles north of Long Island Sound; that two men had seen a plane fall into the Hudson River, near Poughkeepsie; that, in a gully of Mount Riga near Millerton, N.Y., had been found the remains of a plane; that part of a plane had been washed ashore from Long Island Sound, near Bradford. The latest interest in the subject I know of was in the summer of 1921. A heavy object was known to be at the bottom of the Hudson River, near Poughkeepsie, and was thought to be Capt. James' plane.

"It was dredged up and found to be a log."

The Amherst Object

The most characteristic piece of Forteanism from this area, and my favorite, is the tale of the Amherst object. For this we go way back to 1819. Fort drew his information about this gelid object—frog spawn? algae?—from scientific journals.*

On Aug 13 1819, "something had fallen from the sky at Amherst, Mass. It had been examined and described by Prof. Graves, formerly lecturer at Dartmouth College. It was an object that had

upon it a nap, similar to that of milled cloth. Upon removing this nap, a buff-colored, pulpy substance was found. It had an offensive odor, and, upon exposure to air, turned to a vivid red. The thing was said to have fallen with a brilliant light."

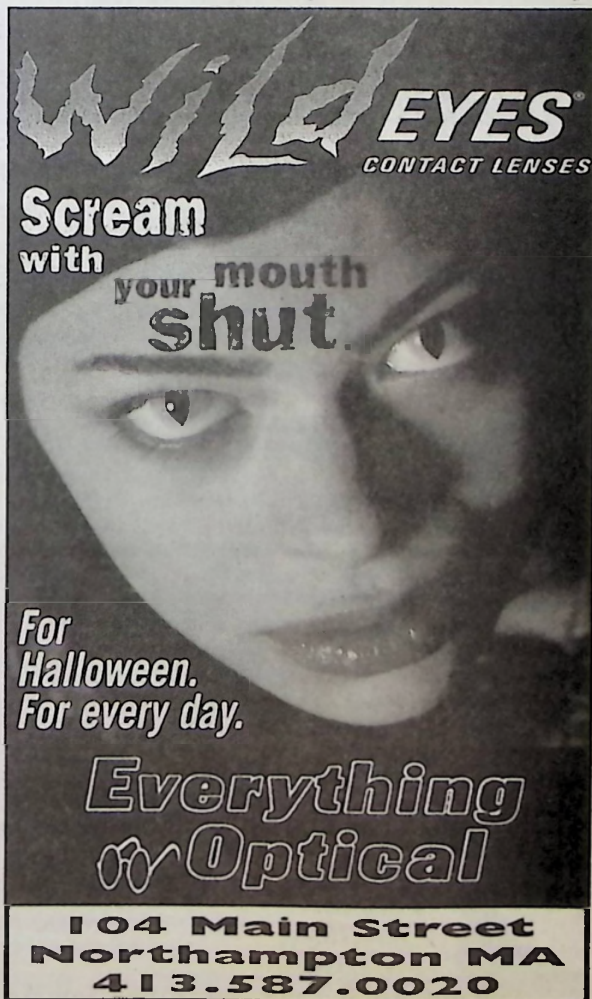
"In the *American Journal of Science*, 1-2-335, is Professor Graves' account, communicated by Professor Dewey: That, upon the evening of August 13, 1819, a light was seen in Amherst—a falling object—sound as if of an explosion.

"In the home of Prof. Dewey, this light was reflected upon a wall of a room in which were several members of Prof. Dewey's family. The next morning, in Prof. Dewey's front yard, in what is said to have been the only position from which the light that had been seen in the room, the night before, could have been reflected, was found a substance 'unlike anything before observed by anyone who saw it.'

"It was a bowl-shaped object, about 8 inches in diameter, and one inch thick. Bright, buff-colored, and having upon it a 'fine nap.' Upon removing this covering, a buff-colored pulpy substance of the consistency of soft-soap, was found—'of an offensive, suffocating smell.'

"A few minutes of exposure to the air changed the buff color to 'a livid color resembling venous blood.' It absorbed moisture quickly from the air and liquefied."

"In the *American Journal of Science*, 1-25-362.



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*Not surprisingly, I found no references to the incident in 1819 issues of the *Daily Hampshire Gazette*. The good scribes of the Valley's newspaper of record were more concerned about campaigning to move Williams College to Northampton from Williamstown, which they did not consider genteel enough. No flying frogs here.

occurs the inevitable damnation of the Amherst object: Prof. Edward Hitchcock went to live in Amherst. He says that years later, another object, like the one said to have fallen in 1819, had been found at 'nearly the same place.' Prof. Hitchcock was invited by Prof. Graves to examine it. Exactly like the first one. It corresponded in size and color and consistency, and the chemic reactions were the same.

"Prof. Hitchcock recognized it in a moment. It was a gelatinous fungus. He did not sashays himself as to the exact species it belonged to, but he predicted that similar fungi might spring up within twenty-four hours— But, before the evening, two others sprang up."

A Boy's Own Fortean: The Gentle, Giant Snake

On a final sidenote, I did find one last unexplained bit, not in Fort, but while attempting to find Fortean in the *Daily Hampshire Gazette*.

In 1819, when the fungus was flying at Dewey's, several hundred people were oohing and ahing in Nahant at the sight of a sea serpent. The paper provides an account from the *Boston Daily Advertiser*. James Prince, Esq., Marshal of the District, writes...

"We left Boston early on Saturday morning. On passing the halfway house on the Salem Turnpike, Mr.

Smith informed us the Sea Serpent had been seen the evening before at Nahant beach, and that a vast number of the people from Lynn had gone to the beach that morning in hopes of being gratified with a sight of him...

"I was glad to find I had brought my *famous masthead spyglass* [those are his italics —P.] with me, as it would enable me from its form and size to view him to advantage...

"His head appeared about three feet out of water; I counted thirteen bunches on his back — my family thought there were fifteen—he passed three times at a moderate rate across the bay, but so fleet as to occasion a foam in the water—and my family and self, who were in a carriage, judged that he was from 50 and not more than 60 feet in length...

"He appeared to us to be a harmless timid animal... the coachman exclaimed, 'Oh, see his glistening eye.'"

To seaworthy observers, it appeared to be neither whale, shark, porpoise, or grampus.

It gave a fellow by the name of Frederic Brown a poetic inspiration, in "Address to the Sea Serpent," one of the best truly awful poems I've read since picking up Adrienne Rich. I close with it, as a warning to anyone would quickly explain away the iffy and the icky.

Oh thou great monster of the ocean,
why can't your Snakeship take a notion,
some pleasant day,
to come to town to see the fashions,
The virtues, vices, and the passions,
and leave the Bay.

Say, why so partial to the Capes,
Is there such flavor in the napes
And sounds of Cods?
If once your Snakeship tastes the beef
In Faneuil Hall, 'tis my belief,
You'll know the odds.

There's scarce a vessel comes to port,
but brings some wonderful report
Concerning thee;
At which the country people stare,
and wonder how the sailors dare
To go to sea.

Some make thee long as Market Street;
Some, modestly, but fifty feet
Thy length declare.
But all confess, indeed, thou art,
like famed Napoleon Bonaparte,
a wonder rare.

Do serpents, from a low condition,
become puff'd up with vain ambition
And lawless sway?
It may be so; and that thou art
The vain, ambitious Bonaparte
of Boston Bay.

Your Snakeship, as a snake of sense,
At this, can never take offense,
for all confess
That Yankees have, by patent right,
in lightsome day or murky night,
a right to guess.

We hope, your Snakeship, if you stay
within the limits of the Bay,
will meet our wish.
Should disappointment be our lot,
we hope, great serpent, you will not
Eat all the fish.

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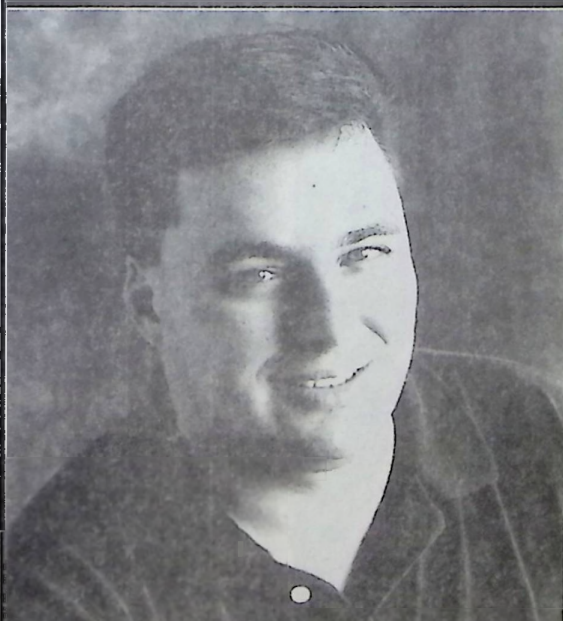


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ALIEN SKIES

Has it ever happened to you?

You've been driving at night on a quiet road... you were camping and gazing at the night sky... you were looking through that telescope you got for a birthday, and there for a moment which seemed forever was something you couldn't explain. There for a matter of seconds, yet it made an impression that would last a lifetime.

There was a time that if you were dumb enough to share your experience with others you'd be accused of ingesting too many controlled substances. That time, though, has passed.

There hasn't yet been a UFO land on the lawn of the White House or park near the United

Nations but enough people have seen things they can't explain to change the popular culture. Public opinion polls show that about half of Americans believe UFO's exist. An even larger percentage are sure the government is withholding information on them.

Every week, television viewers are told "the truth is out there." For members of the Mutual UFO Network (MUFON), though, that's not just a tagline of a popular work of fiction. For the past 30 years, this organization of amateur investigators and researchers have sought the truth behind a number of UFO-related phenomena. And now this organization has a western

Massachusetts chapter, and if you thought nothing like this happens in the Happy Valley, guess again.

"There's a lot of western Massachusetts activity, and people need someone to call. Everybody has seen something unknown in the skies and don't know who to talk to," said Tony Douglas, one of the directors of the local MUFON chapter.

MUFON defines itself as "a grass-roots, non-profit organization comprised of people interested in studying the UFO enigma in an attempt to answer personal and social questions through the review of related literature, research, case investigation, and public education." The national organization is based in Seguin, TX, and the western Massachusetts chapter is affiliated with the Massachusetts Mutual UFO Network headquartered in Wakefield, MA. Nationally, MUFON has 5,000 to 6,000 members.

MUFON members want to hear about what you've seen. Their investigations are fact-driven and low-key. If they can find an explanation, that's great, but if they can't, then they have another story for their files. On the local MUFON website (www.westmassmufon.org), two examples of investigations are shown. One is eas-



BY G. MICHAEL DOBBS

Are You An Abductee?

MUFON receives many reports from people who believe they've been abducted by aliens. Tony Douglas of Western Massachusetts MUFON said that people who do believe they were kidnapped should fill out an incident report (available on the MUFON website) and that MUFON will make a referral to a qualified therapist or investigator for further investigation. Included on the website are the following series of 52 questions to ask oneself if you suspect you are an abductee.

This is a list of 52 common indicators shared by most abductees. It is based on known research on the subject and on personal findings and has been compiled to help you determine if you are an abductee. Of course there may be other explanations for these occurrences and this is in no way an absolute means of knowing if you are an abductee. If you or someone you now does fit many of these traits listed here, please seek the help of a qualified researcher or therapist. In no particular order:

1. Ask yourself if you have had missing or lost time of any length, especially one hour or more.
2. Have you been paralyzed in bed with a being in your room?
3. Do you have unusual scars or marks with no possible explanation on how you received them? Indentation, straight line scar, scars in roof of mouth, in nose, behind or in ears, or genitals, etc. (especially if you have an emotional reaction to them).
4. Have you seen balls of light or flashes of light in your home or other locations?
5. Do you have a memory of flying through the air which could not be a dream?
6. Do you have a marker memory that will not go away (i.e. alien face, examination, needle, table, strange baby, etc.)?
7. Have you seen beams of light outside your home, or come into your room through a window?
8. Have you had dreams of UFO's, beams of light, or alien beings?
9. Have you had a UFO sighting (or sightings) in your life?
10. Do you have a cosmic awareness, an interest in ecology, environment, vegetarianism, or are you very socially conscious?
11. Do you have a strong sense of having a mission or important task to perform, without knowing where this compulsion came from?
12. Have you had unexplainable events occur in your life, and felt strangely anxious afterwards?
13. Have you had a false pregnancy or missing fetus (pregnant, and then not)?
14. Have you ever awoken in another place than where you went to sleep, or don't remember ever going to sleep (but waking up upside down in bed, or in your car)?
15. Have you ever had a dream of eyes such as animal eyes (like an owl or deer), or remember seeing an animal looking in at you (also if you have a fear of eyes)?
16. Have you ever awoken in the middle of the night startled?
17. Do you have strong reactions to pictures of aliens (either an aversion to or being drawn to)?
18. Do you have inexplicably strong fears or phobias (i.e. heights, snakes, spiders, large insects, certain sounds, bright lights, your personal security or of being alone)?
19. Have you experienced self-esteem problems much of your life?
20. Have you ever seen someone with you become paralyzed, motionless, or frozen in time (especially someone you sleep with)?
21. Have you ever awoken with marks, burns or bruises which appeared during the night with no explanation on how you could have possibly received them?
22. Is there or has there been someone in your life who claims to have witnessed a ship or alien near you or has

witnessed you having been missing?

23. Have you ever had, at any time, blood or an unusual stain on sheet or pillow, with no explanation of how it got there?

24. Do you have an interest in the subject of UFOs or aliens, perhaps compelled to read about it a lot, or an extreme aversion towards the subject?
25. Have you ever been suddenly compelled to drive or walk to an out of the way or unknown area?
26. Do you have the feeling of being watched much of the time, especially at night?
27. Have you ever had dreams of passing through a closed window or solid wall?
28. Have you ever witnessed a strange fog or haze that should not be present?
29. Have you ever heard strange humming or pulsing sounds, and you could not identify the source?
30. Have you ever had unusual nose bleeds at any time in your life (or have you awoken with a nose bleed)?
31. Have you ever awoken with soreness in your genitals which can not be explained?
32. Have you ever had back or neck problems, are your 1-3 vertebrae out often, or have you awoken with an unusual stiffness in any part of the body?
33. Do you have chronic sinusitis or nasal problems?
34. Do electronics around you go haywire or oddly malfunction (such as street lights going out as you walk under them, TVs and radios affected as you move close, etc.) with no explanation?
35. Have you ever seen a hooded figure in or near your home, especially next to your bed?
36. Have/had frequent or sporadic ringing in your ears, especially in one ear?
37. Do you have an unusual fear of doctors or tend to avoid medical treatment?
38. Do you have insomnia or sleep disorders which are puzzling to you?
39. Have/had dreams of doctors or medical procedures?
40. Do you have frequent or sporadic headaches, especially in the sinus, behind one eye, or in one ear?
41. Do you have the feeling that you are going crazy for even thinking about these sorts of things?
42. Have/had paranormal or psychic experiences, including intuition?
43. Have you been prone to compulsive or addictive behavior?
44. Have you channeled telepathic messages from extraterrestrials?
45. Have you been afraid of your closet, now or as a child?
46. Have/had sexual or relationship problems (such as a mysterious feeling that you must not become involved in a relationship because it would interfere with something important you must do)?
47. Do you have to sleep against the wall or sleep with your back against a wall?
48. Do you have a difficult time trusting other people, especially authority figures?
49. Have/had dreams of destruction or catastrophe?
50. Do you have the feeling that you are not supposed to talk about these things, or that you should not talk about them?
51. Have you tried to resolve these types of problems with little or no success?
52. Do you have many of these traits but can't remember anything about an abduction or alien encounter?

ily explained as a sighting of the Hood Milk Blimp, while the other is truly a mystery.


Douglas is quick to point out that "what people see may be unidentified, but not extraterrestrial."

If *The X-Files* has prepared us to expect UFO researchers to be either paranoid or delusional, Douglas is a pleasant surprise, with an easy, matter of fact manner and a ready laugh. He said his interest in UFO's is nothing new. "It's an interest I've always had. I looked at the stars as a child and once saw a meteorite and that brought me to it. It's a good hobby." Douglas has written several articles on UFO's and has taught a course at UMass titled "UFOs: The Continuing Enigma."

New England has had many UFO sightings, including the famed "Exeter incident" in 1965 when several police officers, among other regular Joes, saw a large UFO hovering over a field in New Hampshire. More recently, Douglas noted the Hudson Valley sightings from the late 1980's. Thousands of people in New York and Connecticut saw UFO's which also appeared on the radar at Bradley International Airport outside of Hartford.

Perhaps the most famous New England UFO encounter was the abduction of Betty and Barney Hill in New Hampshire. In September, 1961, the couple was driving on a highway when something happened. Only under hypnosis did their amazing story reveal itself. They had had been kidnapped by beings in a UFO.

Before the Hills became national news there had been plenty of accounts of humans making contact with aliens and traveling to outer space. One writer, George Adamski, made a cottage industry out of his cheesy other world stories which seemed like one part Buck Rogers and one part travelogue. Although Adamski sold a lot of books, no one truly took him seriously. The Hills' story was dif-

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ferent. They were serious, solid, middle-of-the-road people who weren't looking to cash in on their story. While Adamski gladly went on his cosmic road trips, the Hills were forced.

More recently, Betty Andreasson's tale of abduction from her home in Ashburnham, MA was recounted in two of investigator Ray Fowler's books, *The Andreasson Affair* and its sequels, *The Andreasson Affair, Phase Two*, and *The Watchers*. More recently still is Fowler's book on the abduction of four campers in Maine (three of whom live in the Brattleboro area; one of whom claims continual abduction and weirdness in his life), *The Allagash Incident*.

Since the story of Betty and Barney Hill in 1961, stories of abduction have worked their way into the mainstream of American popular culture. Steven Spielberg's movies *Close Encounters of the Third Kind* and *ET the Extraterrestrial* were huge hits, while horror author Whitney Strieber reached the best-seller lists with his account of a lifetime of abductions in the books *Communion*, *Confirmation*, *Transformation*, and *The Secret School*. Investigator Budd Hopkins of Wellfleet has uncovered hundreds of cases of kidnapping, detailed in his bestselling books *Missing Time* and *Intruders*.

Douglas noted that there in western Massachusetts "there is a lot of

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Tarot Readings

by

Elly Glover



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reported abduction going on."

"Not a day goes by that there isn't a report of it," said Douglas, who admitted that he is troubled by it. "These people are not crazy. Something is going on." Douglas explained that there is no medical explanation for the physical evidence and that all too many people have the same story. "Details match. People remember the same smells, for instance."

In UFO research circles, there are different theories about the intent of the abductions and the alleged medical experiment that are conducted. Some maintain that the aliens are here for reasons that will help humanity, while others view them as invaders.

After listening to people tell their story, Douglas has developed his own theory. "I've taken the good and evil out of the equation: They're here for themselves." He believes the aliens' agenda is solely their own. He added that many of the abductees have adopted the attitude that aliens are actually benign, despite the agonizing memories they have.

MUFON is all about sharing information, and their website is a great resource for anyone interested in UFO's. They have links to many other sites covering subjects, such as the alleged crash of a saucer at Roswell, New Mexico, to current activity. One feature is a UFO report form. If you see something you can't explain, just print it out, fill in the details, and mail to MUFON.

The local MUFON activities include bi-monthly meetings that often feature a guest speaker, field investigations, and the filing reports of UFO sightings. In addition, there are field investigator training classes, and lectures and classes presented to interested organizations and groups.

One of the more interesting activities sponsored by the local chapter are over-night "sky watches" at the Quabbin Reservoir. "They lock us in overnight and we stay by the tower," said Douglas. Quabbin was picked its view of the sky is not affected by city lights. So far though, the MUFON members haven't seen anything they couldn't identify. "We seen a lot of satellites or what we presume are to be satellites," Douglas said with a laugh.

To become a member of MUFON of Western Massachusetts you must first join the international organization, the Mutual UFO Network, Inc. The fee is \$30.00 annually, and you will receive twelve issues of the MUFON Journal. Secondly, you must make an annual donation of \$15.00 to the local western Massachusetts chapter. Members receive free admittance to all meetings (including lectures with guest speakers), all local mailings and notices, and are eligible to hold office within the organization.

Coming up on November 14 will be Scott Brown discussing research on "stone chambers." This lecture will take place at 2:00 p.m. at the community room of the Fairfield Mall in Chicopee. Author and investigator Phil Imbrogne has been booked for January 23, 2000.

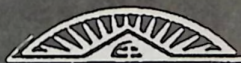
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BERGEN'S INSANE DEED

BY BRIAN TURNER



On January 19, 1900

in North Brookfield, the ballplayer Martin Bergen rose from his bed, killed his wife and two children with an ax, then slashed his throat with a razor.

The murder-suicide by Boston's star catcher caused a sensation: "Bergen Dead!" exclaimed the *Globe*, adding, "Probably Insane."

How long had Bergen been mentally ill? And who knew of his illness?

The morning before the murders Martin Bergen rose "laughing and gay," and "ran races" in the yard with his children, surprising all by the "lightness of his spirits." According to Bergen's father, Michael, who was to discover the bodies, "Martin was always laughing and jolly, or else he was dull and morose."

A neighbor said Bergen "walked down the road, with his two children on either side" to borrow a sleigh. As the children "came toward Martin, he sat smiling and helped them into the seat beside him, [his] head bowed in conversation with the little ones as he drove up the road."

"No one could have been more gentle or more tenderhearted than he was last night," said the *Globe*, "and this morning no fiend could have committed a more horrible crime."

Accounts of the crime scene had a forensic quality: each blow of the ax, the damage to the skulls, the position of the bodies, and the order in which they fell—Florence, 6; Joseph, 3; Harriet, 31; and Bergen by his own hand. He was 28.

Medical Examiner Norwood wondered how "even an insane man could do" what Bergen had done. Bergen took his razor and "stood up before the glass to see that he made no weak and unsuccessful effort.

With the strength of no ordinary man, [he] cut through muscles, tissues and veins, severing the larynx and coming within four inches of complete decapitation."

The Northampton paper had a local angle. In 1893 Bergen played for the city's "independent" ball club. The *Herald* said he "was one of the most popular players."

That Bergen played for Northampton's "amateurs" was an anomaly, since he had played pro ball the year before. His contract was purchased by Pittsburgh, and yet, without explanation, Bergen surfaced in Northampton, a long step down the baseball ladder. All summer Bergen resisted offers to join professional teams, saying that Northampton "had been white by him."

During Bergen's invisible season, the *Brookfield Times* reported a "visit" on July 10. Elsewhere in the paper, we learn why: Martin Bergen married Harriet Gaines on July 11 in Worcester. That the marriage went unmentioned in the Northampton papers suggests that Bergen kept the news to himself.

In the aftermath of the murders, the Worcester papers attributed Bergen's "mania" to some taint or contagion peculiar to the Brookfields. The *Telegram* declared it the "Bloodiest Tragedy Ever Known in a Town That Has Had Its Unusual Horrors." By that, the *Telegram* meant the Newton murders of 1898 in which the suspect, a hired man, seemed "to have sprung up from sleep in a furious frenzy." So, too, Bergen left his bed clothing in a "hollow roll that to the imaginative person shows the fury of the rush to murder."

Sounding a mystifying note, the *Telegram* also reported that Harriet's father, William, who lived in Talcville, New York, had a dream. "I saw my daughter standing before me as plain as I see you. I also saw a river before me whose waters were dark and muddy. As I lay dream-

ing, a knock on my bedroom door awoke me. There stood a messenger [with] a paper containing an account of the tragedies."

Bergen received his fairest hearing from the *Globe's* Tim Murnane, mentor and friend. As president of the New England League, Murnane had "discovered" Bergen playing for Lewiston in 1894, and boosted Bergen's career in his baseball columns.

Murnane believed Bergen was unbalanced by the death from diphtheria of his youngest son, Willie, that April. Hardly an issue of the *Brookfield Times* came out without announcing new cases, which must not have eased Bergen's mind. He left for the funeral, but failed to return for two weeks and didn't explain his absence. Boston "had no idea when Martin Bergen will join the team again," Murnane tersely reported.

Twice more Bergen left the Boston team. "The loss of this one man, in all probability, means the pennant," Murnane wrote, a statement which explained many things, and not just Boston's place in the standings. Still, Murnane celebrated Bergen when he could, calling him the "King of Catchers." On May 7 "Bergen's reappearance delighted the crowd with his masterly catching and grand stick work."

By July, Murnane hinted at a deeper problem. "Bergen had trouble in Kansas City," he wrote, referring to Bergen's last minor league season, 1895. After the murders, Kansas City Manager James Manning confirmed the "trouble," which had a familiar ring to it: "Bergen would leave periodically, and would return when the fancy struck him."

But in September of 1895 Manning and the Kansas City press had downplayed the incident: "[The] note that Manning has suspended Martin Bergen on account of his refusal to accompany the team to Milwaukee ... is a fairy tale." The paper attributed his failure to go to Milwaukee to "sore hands." The fact that Kansas City was negotiating with Boston to sell Bergen's contract may have had something to do with this correction. Once Bergen had killed himself, however, Manning could be more frank about the catcher's behavior.

Murnane went to North Brookfield. "As I drove up to the house I saw Bergen with his two lovely children. I received a hearty welcome from the Boston player, who guessed my mission." In the story that appeared the next day in the *Globe*, Murnane said, "I spent a pleas-

ant hour listening to the catcher's story."

In the version that appeared after Bergen's death, he no longer censored a reference to mental illness: "[After] spending a pleasant hour listening to the catcher's story, I [decided] that Bergen was telling the truth, or was slightly demented."

Bergen told Murnane he would never play for a club other than Boston since he could not tolerate being away from his family. "[His] desire was to finish his work and return to his cottage home, to the two little tots he loved so well." He left Boston after every game, and Harriet would "think nothing of driving to Palmer at midnight" to meet him.

In the end Murnane wrote, "[Bergen] was entitled to the undivided sympathy of the baseball public, as well as players and directors." He sent 28 "half-blown white roses" for Bergen's casket and a card: "May these flowers speak a word of charity for Martin Bergen, who has done this insane deed."

Bergen received little "charity" from the Boston ball club, however.

In interviews after the murders, players and directors gave contradictory accounts of Bergen, citing his "fine character," while also saying that his "mental derangement" was noticeable from the day he joined the club.

Other teams had witnessed Bergen's condition. In Philadelphia Bergen committed so many passed balls that he was benched. The *Globe* said: "Bergen Makes a Farce of His Position." Bergen repeatedly "muffed" the pitches, and the last "ball [went] through Bergen as if he was paper." Bergen later told a neighbor that he believed that someone had stood beside him during the game, trying to stab him, and that he had stepped aside and let the balls pass rather than be stabbed.

When asked whether Boston had planned to trade the catcher, President Soden denied being "in communication" with Bergen. "I say this as it might be thought that he fell into despondency from hearing that we were going to send him somewhere where he did not want to go." Manager Selee said that he expected Bergen to report to the club in the spring, adding to the impression that Bergen's position was secure. Yet the *Washington Post* said that Selee offered Bergen to Washington. After the murders, Soden revealed that Bergen was promised to New York.

Whether Bergen was aware of the trade rumors or not, the catcher believed a "conspiracy" had been joined against him, an attempt to "injure" him and drive him from the club, and he imagined his family physician to be an agent of the conspiracy.

The family physician, Dr. Dionne, described a mind coming apart. Of his last game, Bergen said, "[A] man came up to me and said: 'Martin, you played well. Have a cigar.' I took it, but I did not smoke it. Doctor, I had an idea that cigar was poisoned. It was a big cigar, and it looked to me like poison. I thought this man had been told to give it to me."

Dionne prepared a "bromide" for Bergen "which he took, and the next day seemed to be much

better and was very rational.* I called upon him." Bergen said, "Do you know what idea I had in my head? I thought that someone in the National League had found out you were my physician and had arranged to give me some poison." Of Bergen's affect, Dionne remarked that he "seemed perfectly aware of what he was saying."

"I am not right on the ball field," Bergen told Dionne. "It sets me crazy."

Dionne's last meeting with Bergen was on the Sunday before the murders, when Bergen picked up medicine for his wife. As he left the office, Bergen said, "This has been a very pleasant talk and yet it's strange how it has rattled me: I am almost crazy."

Dionne asked Harriet if she feared Bergen. "While she knew he was not right, he had always been kind, and she had never seen him at all violent."

Yet, according to the *Telegram*, a double-barreled shotgun, unloaded, was found in Harriet's bedclothes on her side of the bed. That she may have hidden it suggests she was more frightened than she let on. North Brookfield's undertaker found two live shotgun shells in Bergen's pockets.

A week after the murders, Walter Channing, a physician, wrote about "the ignorance which people in general seem to have of the early symptoms of insanity." The Bergen murders were an "illustration," he said, "of blindness, for numerous persons had seen evidence of his impaired mental health, and he himself on several occasions had spoken of it."

Channing faulted Dr. Dionne for not recognizing Bergen's "mania of persecution" for what it was, "one of the most dangerous forms of insanity." Officials of the Boston club, Channing said, had "recognized his condition, [yet] all the warning signs were disregarded," because of "the old idea, still somewhat prevalent, that insanity implies some moral defect, and is to be concealed because it is a disgrace."

Given the pattern of Bergen's career, it seems likely that managers and owners, eager to have the benefit of his skills, made allowances for his "peculiarities" and for years the press downplayed his behavior. Only after the murders was the obvious addressed, that Bergen was mentally ill and had been for some time, and by then it was too late.

*bromide, a sedative, was meant to treat the nervousness brought about by "tobacco heart"



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the halloween

I friggin' hate Halloween.

I hate pumpkins. In fact, I hate gourds of all kinds. Most likely, you don't really care why, but I'm gonna tell you anyway. Let us forget all the reasonable reasons. Like the fact that the "holiday" is a candy manufacturer's wet-dream. Like the fact that the greeting card companies make a fortune. Like the fact that normally disinterested parents focus on their children for a change and then promptly go back to the real deal after its all over. These mean nothing to me. I don't care and I don't hate Halloween for lofty or idealistic reasons. I hate Halloween for the simple fact of the horror I experienced as a young child: True, stomach turning, horror. Yes, I fear this day of days. I cower from Halloween and the palpable terror it inspires, a fear so potent, that I become queasy and feverish just thinking about it.

Picture this: a sweet four-year old Duke. Halloween. Mommy and I are decorating. We're getting ready for trick-or-treaters, much like everyone else. Fake cob-webs, costumes, spooky music, candy, and pumpkins. We carved a bunch of pumpkins. Very scary faces. Candles inside. You know, like everyone else. We are America. We are Halloween. The two of us spend the afternoon decorating. We are gonna have the coolest scary pad in the neighborhood.

Then it happens.

I'm all about helping mommy. (I was a very eager-to-please young lad back then, I swear.) I get her the Snickers. I get her the candy corn. I get her the plastic bats. I get her... the pumpkin. Every little thing is going perfectly. Then I go to get the **BIG** pumpkin. As I carry it across the living room, I begin to struggle with the weight. It is very heavy for the little, teeny, Duke. Half-way across the room, it begins to slip from my little arms. My fingers lose their grasp. The pumpkin, the **BIG** pumpkin, falls. It lands on one of the two-week old kittens that our cat Cocoa has recently given to. **There is pumpkin all over. There all over. Blood and brains squirt the poor thing's head. Its little body is crushed, and... it is still alive. Oh... my... God. I can still, to this day, see that scene in my head. The kitty is panting and with every pant comes more blood. I begin to wail and scream. My mom begins to wail and scream. Cocoa begins to wail and scream. There has never been a greater proof of the existence of a real, and malicious, God. There is evil in the world and it has easily, and without too much effort, manifested itself through me.**

Mommy called the animal people. We waited for them. I watched that helpless creature for an hour. If I had been a man, I could have put it out of its misery. Instead, the little smashed darling suffered in agony while we cried. The animal people came and gave it a shot, killing it. Mommy told me that they were giving it Vitamin K and taking it to a farm where it would live happily for a long time. I knew she was lying to me. Not only was I a sick and tainted murderer, but I now knew that mommy was capable of deceit. My world crumbled. My innocence was gone, forever. I threw up all night.

I hate Halloween. I hate pumpkins. I hate all gourds. Every type. Every shape. Every, fucking, thing that has ever had anything to do with Halloween. I hate Charlie Brown. Him and his God-damned *Great Pumpkin* special. God, I can see that little ball of life right now; brains, blood, and my humanity. The realization that to be human, means to be able to kill. To be human, means to be able to kill.

by Duke Aaron
Il Duce

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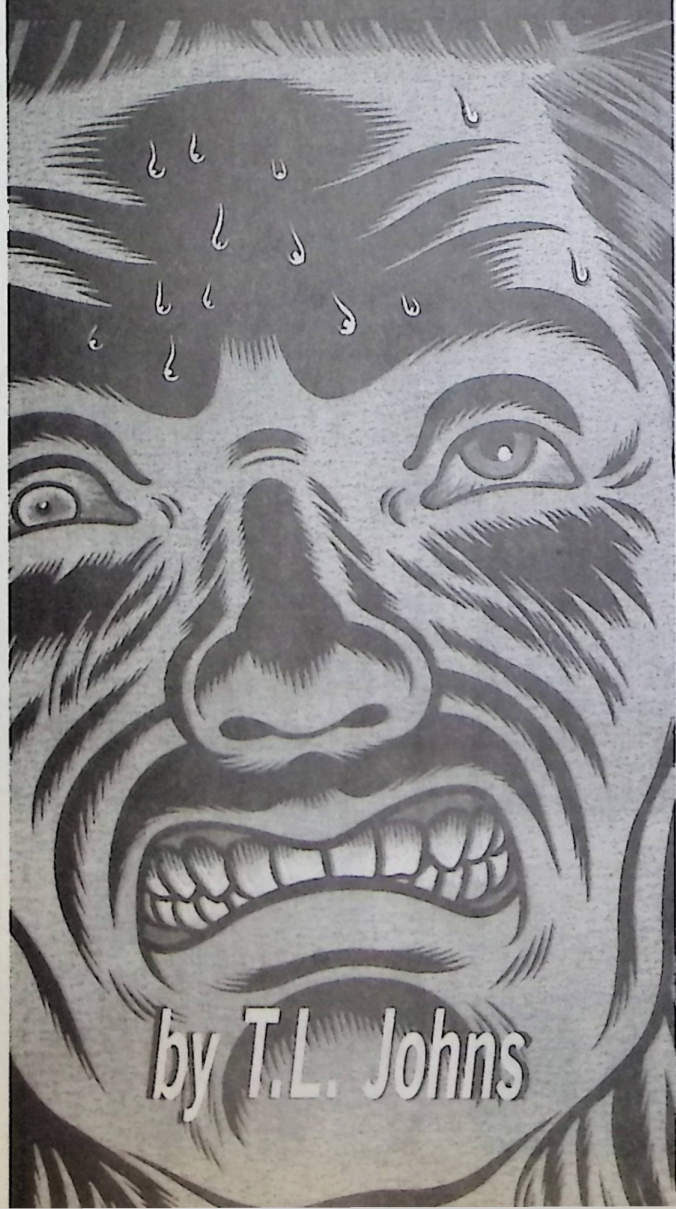
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INTERVIEW
CHARLES BURNS

by T.L. Johns

Charles Burns has been part of the "alternative scene" in comics for many years. His unusual creations are usually mentioned in the same company with such alternative comic creators as Richard Sala, Dan Clowes, Peter Bagge and the Hernandez brothers. Burns' style is as unique as the stories and characters he creates and most comics readers usually have strong reactions - either positive or negative - about his work. In addition to comics, he has also done numerous drawings for newspapers and magazines all over the country, provided art for musicians and had one of his characters, Dog Boy, join the ranks of MTV's experimental Liquid Television.

TL: Were there things in your high school years that made you start to draw and get you thinking, "Hey, maybe I can make a career out of this?"

CB: Art was something that I'd always done and drawing was something I'd always enjoyed - I forced friends to make comics with me. I lived in Seattle at the time and Seattle was conducive to staying indoors because it rains a lot. When you're trying to entertain yourself on long rainy days, it's perfect for learning to draw and I ended up sticking with it.

TL: Did that start for you when you were really young?

CB: When I was really little I'd do it to entertain myself; but also being attracted to comics, just responding to comics and illustrations, you know, looking at pictures in books that my parents would bring home from the library; so there were things around that I would look at all the time. I was probably influenced by that. Seeing collections of classic comic strips, art books, just stuff around that was interesting to look at.

TL: Were there any specific comics you liked when you were younger?

CB: Yeah, the kinda typical things that were given to kids to grow up with, but I read some of the comics that were a little more unusual - for American kids anyway. I grew up reading *Tintin*, which was very famous in Europe. But it really wasn't a strip that made its way to the United States. Now you can find it in children's book stores and so forth. Those had a big impact on me as far as just liking the very clear, linear, storytelling, and the great artwork. They were kids' adventure sort of stories.

TL: What were some of your inspirations? You seem to have sort of a '50s feel to your style; was any of that what you brought with you from that time?

CB: For me there was a series of paperback books that were reprinted - the early *Mad* comic books. I think my dad had picked those up and I'm not sure if I was supposed to be reading them or not (*he laughs*); he thought some of the subject matter was a bit hard

WHO'S ASKING?

HONEST ABE...

on impressionable minds, but the look that you see in a lot of those early *Mad* comics - that rich brush work and very rich looking lines; that's probably where a lot of that feeling came from for me. Emulating that sort of look or feeling that came from those books.

TL: It's been said often enough that you have almost a kind of woodcut look to your art. What specifically do you use to get that effect?

CB: Well, it's just a brush; there was always a certain quality of line I always liked when I was looking at comics, which was this very fluid, tapering line. I would sit there and try to draw it with a pen. You know, make two lines and fill it in. But finally, someone explained to me that it was done with a brush. It was just a matter of emulating that line I'd seen in other places, only maybe pushing it a little further.

TL: Well, I noticed in one issue of *Black Hole* there was a scene almost like a movie shot where it was zooming in and the center scene just became more and more complicated as the scene went on. It had a wonderful effect, just looking at it. But I imagine that became more intense the more you had to add in.

CB: Yeah, but sometimes there's also just the physical quality of the line, for me anyway, that just adds a certain feeling to the subject matter. It's almost like a physical reaction that adds to the whole overall feeling.

TL: Well it's interesting that you say that, because when I've asked some people "What do you think of Charles Burns' work?" I'd sometimes get an almost a visceral reaction from them. I get everything from "well it's kinda creepy" to getting an actual shiver or physical reaction from them. Is that

something you actually intended?

CB: Absolutely. I mean, I can only speak for myself, but when I'm looking at certain drawings I do there's almost an optical effect or a physical effect that takes place, almost a flickering of how your eyes are moving across the page. The overall effect, the quality of the line is not there just to be rendering a shape, but it should be helping with atmosphere and the overall feeling or mood of the piece. For a while, I'm not sure how many years ago, I did photography and I took it pretty seriously, and the one thing that contributed to the way I visualize things now, is that when you're looking through a camera - especially if you have a reflex lens - you're sitting there and you're composing things in a rectangle and after awhile you begin to start constantly shifting perspectives; trying different angles. That same idea is the type of feeling I try to bring to a page when I'm composing a page. I just don't start at the top and draw a panel, then go to the next panel. I compose everything with tracing paper and I'm cutting things up, flipping them over, enlarging them, making them smaller, moving things around. I mean, sometimes the pages are fairly simple in composition, but the idea of being able to shift your focus and trying different versions, having that fluidity or whatever you want to call it; having the ability to move that rectangle around and getting different points of view.

TL: Give the readers your definition of what *Black Hole* is.

CB: In short, *Black Hole* is a horror romance. It eventually - and I hate to use this term - will become this kind of coming-of-age sort of horror romance.

That's the best I can describe it.

TL: The whole storyline with the plague is so interesting to see what it's doing to different people, but you haven't told us a whole lot yet. Will we be finding out more about what's going on with that?

CB: I'm actually being intentionally vague. Other people have pointed out, "Well here's a story about teenagers but you're not including their home life or their life with their parents." That's certainly intentional as well. The few times that parents are included they're just in the background.

I mean, I remember what it was like to be that age and my interests had nothing to do with my parents or any adults. I was just caught up with my friends, and my social situation and whatever I was thinking about. They were there holding down the fort and telling me to do my homework or whatever. They were still fairly dismissive. So, in a way, those kind of things come in. And the same thing about the plague. Some ideas are talked about but I don't dwell on it, other than using it as kind of a springboard for pushing these kids into a much more profound situation than they would normally be in. I intentionally gloss over some of the facts about the plague, I guess.

TL: Some of the themes or obsessions I've noticed throughout the body of your work, such as love, are explored, but at the same time it seems that love always has something to do with isolation and loneliness. Is that a theme you enjoy writing about?

CB: Well, there certainly are things that I keep coming back to. Like the idea of the teen plague. Before I did *Black Hole*, there were two or three other short stories, and a longer Big Baby story, where I'm dealing with similar subject matter in a way where I have kids or teenagers just going through this big trauma in adolescence and then there's this plague, which heightens it, brings it to a boil, makes it stronger and more dramatic. I guess there's similar ways of dealing with the same subject matter; that teen angst and that





kind of really emotionally heightened period of anyone's life.

TL: And that's certainly being analyzed these days.

CB: This is just a way of looking at all those situations and having this little catalyst which pushes the whole idea further.

TL: Do you think it's because of all the emotionality of that particular time in our lives?

CB: Well, that transition from childhood into adulthood is a rather turbulent period and in a way that's kind of what *Black Hole* is focusing

on. There are two main characters - there are other important characters as well - but there's the male character Keith and the female character Chris and in a way their plot threads are going to be weaving in and out; but basically the story is following them through this incredibly turbulent time in their lives and it sees them through to a resolution of sorts and you're seeing how both of them deal with this situation. The story is working through that whole period of transition from adolescence into adulthood.

TL: Are you willing to talk about *Black Hole*'s jump from Northampton's Kitchen Sink Press (see *VMag* 18 for an in-depth look at the company's rise and fall) over to Fantagraphics?

CB: Early on I'd done work with Denis Kitchen and for me - I guess it's part of my personality - but he'd always done right by me. I usually just gave Denis first choice of publishing something. I was just sticking by him. He was one of the early underground cartoon publishers. At some point I became aware that the company was sort of in transition and in a way I didn't really feel as comfortable in the same company. It's just one of those things where I stuck it out in loyalty to Dennis because he'd never screwed me over and that was pretty much it. They just reached a point with the company where they couldn't make it.

TL: You also did the cover for Iggy Pop's *Brick by Brick* album. Did you get to meet Iggy?

CB: Oh yeah (*he laughs*), it was great. It was one of those things that was nice because he's someone I'd always liked and grown up with and enjoyed his music so it was one of those rare things where you get to get linked up with someone where you actually like the music. I got to go up to New York and see him and show him the work. It was really pretty much a situation of he'd just changed record companies and they'd called me up and were like "well, we don't know, we think we have a short period of time to figure all this stuff out and we think we want to use you; come up with something and bring it to Iggy and if he likes it we'll go from there." His reaction was that he thought it was funny and he laughed.

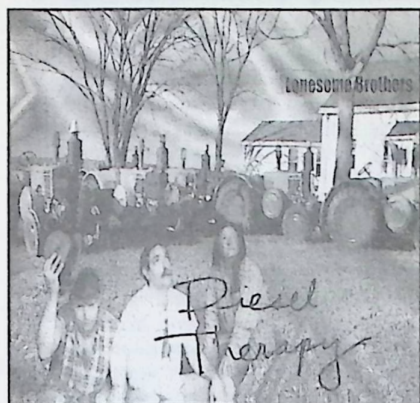
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LONESOME BROTHERS DIESEL THERAPY Tar Hut Records

The Lonesome Brothers are the hottest band of brothers not named Allman or Neville. The Northampton-based quintet features local legends Ray Mason on bass and Jim Armenti on guitar and mandolin, with Bob Grant on drums, Doug Beaumier on pedal steel and Jim Weeks on guitar and keyboards. Armenti and Mason — brothers in spirit only — have been rocking audiences up and down the East Coast for longer than anyone can remember. If you asked an industry suit what genre these guys inhabit he would say alt/country, but that would only be part of the story. The fact is, when the Brothers get going, they rock with the intensity of Poco or Buffalo Springfield.

Diesel Therapy, the group's second CD, picks up where the first one left off, with stellar, riff-laden songs and killer ballads. Mason and Armenti are both prolific songwriters, and the disc features alternating contributions from each. The opening cut, "Going Blind," is classic Armenti; searing, sweet riffs, massive, steady grooves and wry, folksy lyrics. The next cut, "Remember to Forget," is classic, world-weary Mason. Here as elsewhere, it's Mason's singing that stands out; his voice is soulful, funny and thoroughly human, a vast improvement over the bland crap that you hear on the *Country Channel* or MTV.

The title cut is a monumental piece of songwriting. Diesel therapy is what happens to guys in prison who file appeals or are a pain in the ass. In the

dead of night they are hustled aboard prison buses and shipped off to the next institution, ad infinitum, out of reach of family members and friends. Not many songs are dedicated to prisoners these days; this one is a hook-laden cruncher that rocks as hard as anything remotely calling itself country. With humor and without pretensions, it sticks up for guys who are getting fucked over behind bars. The Brothers are like that; they have a fine and grizzled populist spirit and have come up with the best prison song since the heyday of Johnny Cash.

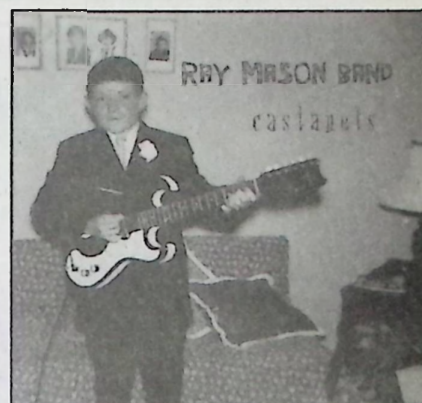
"All Jacked Up," penned by Mason, is an amphetamine-edged, piledriver of a song that would have done Canned Heat proud. It features some serious picking by Armenti over layers of Beaumier's sweet-sounding pedal steel. "Why you want to set yourself on fire?" Mason croons. "She won't take you back when you're all jacked up." Fine street wisdom from one of the uncrowned kings of barroom rock.

"Every Goodbye" is an Armenti ballad with great backing vocals from another local hero, Cheri Knight. "Don't Make Me a Memory" is another fine ballad by Mason. More gems: Mason's "Digging Too Deep," a fast-as-quicksilver country rocker that sends the home crowds into paroxysms of twirling when the Brothers preform it live; "Lucinda," another kick-ass Armenti rocker; and "Elly Mae's Party," one of my favorite songs on the disc. It's a sweet, bluesy number with a warm nostalgic feel that is reminiscent of Ray Davies.

As excellent as **Diesel Therapy** is, it doesn't begin to suggest how good the Brothers are live. Sometimes Armenti, Mason and Grant perform as a trio, and I swear there are moments when they're as much Cream as country. The Brothers are serious players and they are perfectly capable of stepping it up several notches when things get nice and sweaty. Armenti is a multi-instrumentalist who is accomplished in many styles of playing; Mason cut his teeth in epic jams as a member of the legendary Signal in the early 80's. Take my word for it, the Brothers can rock; comparisons with Buffalo Springfield and Poco don't come cheap.

Buy **Diesel Therapy** without delay, and check out the Brothers as soon as you can.

- Dave Biederman



RAY MASON BAND CASTANETS Wormco

After gushing on about the super Ray Mason tribute album **It's Heartbreak That Sells**, in the August issue, I thought I'd let a month or so pass before reviewing Ray's latest. But the time has come; I'll keep it short and sweet.

Castanets is what pampered Mason fans have come to expect. It's quirky but accessible, raw sounding but well produced, and chock-a-block with outstanding new tunes. Without going into each song individually, or choosing particular favorites (all but impossible), I'll say only that you will not be disappointed. Each track is a gem and, though the disc is a bit short in length, there are thirteen of 'em.

Distinguished and innovative performances help to make the onslaught near relentless. Mason's work is every bit as noteworthy and entertaining as, say, Elvis Costello or Tom Petty in their prime, without sounding as derivative. His voice continues to be singular, totally recognizable but comfortable. And nobody has more of a handle on songwriting. Ray's lyrics are always a joy, clever and well crafted, and his melodies always stick in your mind. His band is tight and savvy. When will the national media pick up on Ray instead of rehashing the same tired sound-alike (read "alternative") acts? What else is there to say? Oh yeah... great cover shot.

(Ray Mason Band, 9 Depot Rd.,
Haydenville MA 01039 / (413) 268-7059)
- Meathook Williams

music



YOLANDA & THE PLASTIC FAMILY WELCOME TO YOLANDAWORLD VIVA Records

Ahhh! Yolanda. Radical Fairie. Drag Queen. Transgender Warrior. More divine than Divine. Hailing from Burlington Vermont, Yolanda and her Plastic Family have put out one of the best CD's I've heard in a long time. **Welcome To Yolandaworld** is filled with dynamic and expressive tunes, well-crafted lyrics and music, phenomenal lead and background vocals, and super production. There's not one sleeper on this twelve-track disc, and the song-writing team of Yolanda and organist (no pun, really) Adam Wood really breaks some ground while still incorporating nods to disco, funk, lounge, and a soft version of the classic Human Sexual Response. If I wasn't married, Yolanda would have a full-time, 24-7, stalker-in-love.

The song themes are pretty traditional. Love, relationships, loneliness, personal loss, and outrage. I'm sure that Jesse Helms would recoil in horror at the thought that Yolanda could have messages that are fairly universal, but luckily there is a song dedicated to Jesse and the Christian Right (or is it Wrong?), "Eat Me." Jon Ackland lays down a serious fretless bass groove with help from percussionist Eric Rohrbach and the tune

just moves. "Angels" — reprised later on the disc as an acoustic version — is my favorite song here and really shows off the vocal interplay between Yolanda and background vocalist Martha Saylor. "The Sickness of Beauty," "Scary," "Home," and "Alien Love Child" are four songs that Yolanda sings about herself and her place in the world. I challenge anyone to listen to them and not see a part of themselves in the lyrics

(imagine Joe Shmo and Mary-Jane Reg'lar sharing a common humanity with a very talented and insightful drag queen! Ronald Reagan must be rolling over in his grave. Well, I don't really remember if he's dead or not, but you get the point.)

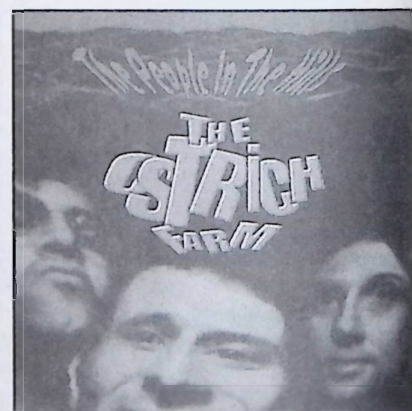
"The Boy Who Sings The Blues" and "Let Me Love You" ground this disc in solid Diva firmament. I love you, I want you... that kind of stuff. Personally I never dig "burning love" songs, but the music and vocals are as good as the rest of the tunes here and won me over despite myself. "Right To Surrender" comes on a little schmaltzy, but since it's "for those who have lost their lives to AIDS" this sort of goes with the territory. I can't really imagine a zippy tune on that subject, can you? "Breathe" and "Cool Intellect" are the only songs I haven't mentioned yet, or rather I just did, but they kick. "Breathe" is a little ambiguous in the realm of subject matter, but seems to be saying something pretty meaningful. "Cool Intellect" is one of those songs you put on your severely -depressed friend's mix-tape; good message: you're great, go for it, I'll be here when you need me. **Welcome To Yolandaworld** is absolutely killer from beginning to end and should be scarfed up by everyone that likes good music and/or has a brain.

Yolanda has something going on. Even *Billboard Magazine* likes her and they're like straight out of Casey Casem's butt-hole. She has a Burlington, VT cable show called *The Cherrie and Yolanda Show*

that airs weekly. Check her out at: Yolanda!, POB 812, Burlington, VT 05492; (802) 651-7621; yolandaman@aol.com; or www.yolanda.net. Keep an eye out for Craig Mitchell's dance remix of "Angels" and live shows all over the Northeast. I hope a venue around the Valley will book this band soon, but since they don't play snoozin' folk, I won't hold my breath. If you really want to check this band out, then Boston, Burlington, and New York seem like the best bets. In the meantime, get the disc. You won't be sorry and you could even buy two and send one copy to your favorite Republican politician.

- Duke Aaron

Il Duce



THE OSTRICH FARM THE PEOPLE IN THE HILLS mp3.com

The ostrich is big. The ostrich is powerful. The ostrich is funky. The Ostrich Farm is all that and their new release, **The People In The Hills**, fookin' rawks. This is a power-trio that can't be denied. Elements of The Soft Boys, Zappa, Beefheart, The Beastie Boys, and about a million other varied influences get poured into this concoction and what comes out are some really unique (some would say quirky), mind-altering tunes. The fourteen tracks here vary from the frenetic pace of NASCAR to the smooth stylings of Barry White. Sound confusing? Listen to **The People In The Hills** and prepare to get even more confused. Guitarist/vocalist Tony Jillson, bassist Chris Millner, and drummer J.J. O'Connell (better known as St. Mix, Bion, and Some Guy On Drums) deserve to have some big label attention from this.

It is really hard to pick highlights out of these fourteen great tracks, but the Don Byron-esque "Goddess of Love," the Hendrix-meets-Capt. Beefheart "Boo Doo," the heavy metal funk of "Blacklight (Re-animator)" show off the band's power, diversity, and well, oddness. The songs "Spiral In," "Hazy Thoughts (with The Hypnotist)," "Closer And Closer," and "The Chamber" do a good job showing off the precision and craftsmanship these guys put into their work, not to mention some seriously funky grooves from three funny-looking white guys. "Girl Like You in a Place Like This," "You Want It You Bought It," "Man From The Future," and "Men Working Things Out" hit the listener like a mallet right upside the head. The Ostrich Farm can rock with the best of them and in a perfect world, would soon destroy most of the bands on rock radio. I can't describe "Creeps In My Backyard," except to say that I'm still looking over my shoulder. The last song, "The Edge of Nowhere," well, uh, I didn't like it. A little too soul for me. Not that I don't like soul, its just that I don't think they pulled it off. Oh, well. When was the last time you bought a CD and loved every single track?

These guys are local and are based out of a real ostrich farm in Ashfield. Pretty weird, but sorta 'splains a lot, don't it? **The People In The Hills** is one of them new-fangled releases and is available on mp3. Download this sucker at MP3.com/ostrichfarm.

The Ostrich Farm can be contacted at ostrich@javanet.com for any freaks that would like more info.

- Duke Aaron

Il Duce

THE FLAMING LIPS THE SOFT BULLETIN Warner Bros.

The Flaming Lips are probably one of the most under-rated and misunderstood bands of recent years. Written off as a one-hit-wonder after the popularity of that mildly annoying Vaseline song, they have since garnered much critical praise. **The Soft Bulletin** should help this trend along, but most likely keep them in popular obscurity as well. Two years in the making, this disc is lush and symphonic; filled with slow tempos, sweet melodies, intelligent lyrics, and (horror of horrors) instrumentals. I hope that I'm wrong, but I don't think you'll hear many of these songs over the airwaves.

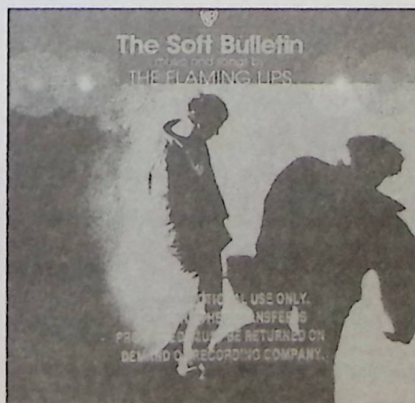
The Soft Bulletin has twelve great songs on it. The only unfortunate part of that is that there are fourteen tracks included. The disc's opener, "Race for the Prize," and track eight, "Waitin' for a Superman," are reprised at the end of this release as pretty uninspired remixes. Track two, "A Spoonful Weighs a Ton," and track five, "Buggin'," have the pop element and song-lengths, that just might get them on the charts, but don't hold your breath. The rest of the songs explore a wide territory of music and much of it is fairly reminiscent of some early Weather Report stuff. I don't want to scare anyone off with references to 70's fusion jazz, but with all the empty space and keyboard lushness in these songs, it fits.

It took me a few listens to really get into it. This is not an easy album. There are elements of rock, jazz, pop, classical, and trip-hop included here. That may sound like a jumpy, all-too-eclectic mix, but The Lips have done a remarkable job with providing continuity from song to song. There is an overriding sound to this whole release and the post-production effort helps gives the separate tracks one sonic vision. Comparisons could be made to Radiohead's **OK Computer** and to some of Pink Floyd's later stuff, but these guys are from Oklahoma and there is definitely an American feel here. In the end, I would suggest listening to a few songs before getting the CD, as it is definitely not for everyone. However, if you are an adventurous music listener, with an open mind, you'll be glad to have it (I liked it even though there are a lot of tempo changes throughout the songs and I'm very afraid of them generally).

You can write the band at The Flaming Lips, POB 75995, OKC, OK 73147.

- Duke Aaron

Il Duce



ELIADES OCHOA SUBLIME ILLUSION Higher Octave World



BUENA VISTA SOCIAL CLUB Presents IBRAHIM FERRER World Circuit/Nonesuch

The Grammy-winning Buena Vista Social Club watches as two more members strike out on their own with this pair of superb releases. These artists are hardly fledglings though, especially Ibrahim Ferrer at age 72. What both men are, however, are two of the most canny and enjoyable proponents of traditional Cuban music. Basically, all the cuts on both albums would sound at home in pre-Castro Cuba. And, though there are at least dozens of players from that era still around today, these guys are among the very best.

Ochoa represents the more "country" end with his bare bones outfit Cuarteto Patria, consisting of himself on tres (Cuban acoustic guitar) and vocals, second guitarist Humberto Ochoa, bassist William Calderon, and percussion-

music

ists Roberto Torres and Eglis Ochoa (yes, there seems to be a bit of nepotism here). Although Ochoa's voice is drenched with character, it's his guitar playing that truly dazzles. These guajira tunes have immense appeal in their simplicity, and the band is only occasionally joined by horns (nicely provided by Luis González). Ry Cooder, who's done so much to promote this music, contributes graceful guitar on "La Cumparsa" (as well as bringing along his son, Joachim, on drums), and Los Lobos' David Hidalgo does likewise on a couple of tracks. One of my heroes, Charlie Musselwhite, blows harp on the bluesy "Teje que teje." Inexplicably, this monster talent sounds a bit out of place here, to my ears anyway (I've not heard Charlie's new album **Continental Drifter** yet, but it is touted to be a multi-cultural endeavor) but overall, this is a very satisfying disc.

Ibrahim Ferrer, on the other hand, brings a far more urban sound into the studio. No "camposinos sitting around the campfire" here; this one has its roots in both rural and citified life. In many ways, Ferrer most typifies the "old guard" of Havana's music scene. Before being "rediscovered" by Cooder just a few years ago, he was actually shining shoes for a living! But with Buena Vista Social Club's Grammy and its resultant 1.5 million copies sold, this injustice appears to finally have been rectified. With his plush-as-velour vocals and world class band, Ferrer truly evokes the

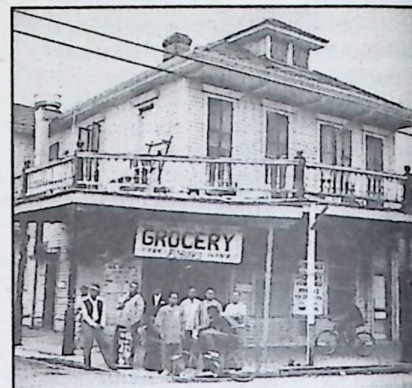
sound of Havana before the revolution. You can almost see and smell the smoke-filled bars and dancehalls of that era. Urban it may sound, but the overall ambiance is languid; very relaxed. The arrangements are at once nostalgic and vital. Ry Cooder produces and provides his trademark slide guitar (though he honed this style collaborating with the late Hawaiian guitar master Gabby Pahinui, the Cubans like to refer to it as "cowboy guitar").

It is indeed bittersweet that success has found these musicians so late in their lives (another esteemed Buena Vista alumnus is Compay Segundo, aged 90!). One can't help but imagine what could have transpired had the U.S. embargo against Cuba been lifted years or even decades ago. Suffice to say, shoe polish would not have been involved.

Each of these discs is a microcosm of a still vibrant art form, elegantly realized by true pioneers of the genre, and well worth a trip to the old record shop. Recently, movie producer Wim Wenders put together a documentary about Buena Vista Social Club. I haven't seen it yet, but I'm told it's outstanding as well.

(Nonesuch Records, 75 Rockefeller Plaza, NY, NY 10019 / Higer Octave Records, 23852 Pacific Coast Highway, Suite 2C, Malibu, CA 90265; (310) 589-1525; www.higheroctave.com)

- Meathook Williams



DIRTY DOZEN BRASS BAND BUCK JUMP Mammoth Records

Brass bands are designed to be able to move down the street. As such, stringed instruments become somewhat impractical. So, too, are keyboards... unless they're on a squeezebox. It is, essentially, mostly horns, with a trombone blowing out the bass line. There's a drummer (or a couple of drummers) working out in a marching band style. All turned out together, it can be quite a funky experience.

When the Dirty Dozen first hit the scene lo' those many years ago, they were pretty unique. Sure, brass bands were fairly common in the Crescent City, but in the rest of the US, they were a whole new species. As such, they came out like gangbusters and were received with thunderous applause wherever they went. It's been over ten years since their first record, and they are no longer the only kids on the block. There are a number of brass bands that work it outside of the city lines, and the Dozen have changed quite a bit as well. They've done studio albums, concept albums and smoothed-out R&B. Their new album, though, is a return to the old.

When they last played this area, they tried to push their new R&B outlook. What was most disappointing was the fact that it made them sound like everything else. They have an incredible sound, and when they are on, they are unstoppable. They are not, however, Urban Contemporary fare. Which is probably why they tried so hard to cross over. I guess it didn't work, because this is a strong mix of old school, horn-laden grooves, from the latin-flavored "Pet the Cat" to the classic "Unclean Waters."

It's nice to see them still push-

THE RETURN OF THE HOT-L WARREN

Of all the many watering holes here in The Valley, none has more charm and history than South Deerfield's Hot-L Warren.

With part of the original structure dating back to before the Civil War, it is certainly one of the most enduring spots in the area. The famous have enjoyed her charms over the years (Calvin Coolidge dined there and is rumored to have spent the night once or twice), and students from nearby colleges have made it a popular landmark as well. Years ago, the Hot-L had bands and comedy every weekend, even launching a few careers in the process.

Beginning October 2nd, the Hot-L Revival Series will be launched with local favorites Trailer Park. Although a small cover charge will be asked for this special show, the policy thereafter will be no cover. The series will feature top bands every Saturday night; upcoming acts include the Lonesome Brothers, Mudfoot, Sugarbone, Borderland and the Drunk Stuntmen. Drink specials will also be offered. You can find out more details by calling 413.665.2301. For booking info contact Jay at 413.247.5435, x2.

- Meathook Williams

reviews

ing the funky, brass-heavy groove... even when they are covering Louis Jordan's Caribbean tune, "Run Joe." There's also an amazing cover of Marvin Gaye's "Inner City Blues." To hear that classic bassline interpreted by a tuba is something else.

This is a classic record for the Dozen, which is good. The fact that they picked John Medeski (of Medeski, Martin & Wood) to produce certainly didn't hurt. He manages to lay down some nice keyboard lines here and there, most notably on "Nutballus."

(www.mammoth.com)
- Phil Straub



PAUL JONES PUCKER UP BUTTERCUP Fat Possum

Fat Possum, out of Oxford, Mississippi, specializes in gritty, stripped-down, distorted blues in a John Lee Hooker style. God bless 'em. With Hound Dog Taylor gone from the earth, there's not nearly enough of this stuff to go around.

Paul Jones attacks his guitar with an intensity that pop-rockers wish they had. Sadly, he doesn't have much else going on. It's obvious that he doesn't spend much time on the lyrics ("We're gonna cook some catfish tonight/gonna put it on the grill/We're gonna call all our friends over/gonna tell everybody/we're grilling some fish tonight"), instead focusing on laying down some nasty distorted grooves.

At times, the mix between vocals and music can sound like two entirely different sessions, but overall this album cooks in typical Fat Possum style. Having said that, my favorite cut is the re-mixed, techno-friendly version of "Goin' Back Home." Signs of things to come at the good Possum, mayhaps, or just them having fun? Only time will tell.

(www.fatpossum.com)
- Phil Straub



WIGGINS SISTERS MINNESOTA Self-distributed CD

From the opening jangle of "Desperate Men" this disc totally engages the listener with its rich array of the Wiggins' particular brand of folk and folk-rock songs. A bit more rockin' than their first release, **Minnesota** is my pick for best album in the genre so far this year.

Recently, I caught Rosanne Cash and Emmylou Harris singing a duet on TV. Now I like Ms. Cash just fine, and all but worship Emmylou, but they didn't come close to the beautiful harmony sounds of Mizzy and Casey.

There's a bit more adventure with this release and it only widens the scope for their diverse talents. The bluesy "Boys From New Jersey" kicks ass, and could live up any party. Mizzy's throaty voice tears through this one, showing yet another facet of her singing abilities. Casey also shines when singing solo here. Like their first CD, the lion's share of the tunes are self-penned, with each sister contributing about half. And, once again, there's no filler. The tunes are catchy, the lyrics meaningful, production is crystalline and the arrangements gorgeous. I particularly found the soulful violin parts satisfying. On the more rock 'n' roll end of things, "You're Mean" is a standout with a great retro organ sound. "Ireland" is an anthem of sorts, carrying with it a fine Celtic melody featuring penny whistle and double picked guitar. "Dance" is just voices and per-

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cussion, exquisitely fascinating. The disc culminates with the title song, an enticing country ballad.

I really enjoyed their first disc, but in **Minnesota**, the sisters have taken their sound further, gaining new ground and a certain maturing of their artistry that I'm confident will continue: It's only a matter of time before these two get their well deserved place on today's music scene.

(POB 768, Westport CT, 06881 /
www.wigginsisters.com)
- Meathook Williams

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PRETENDERS
¡VIVA EL AMOR!
Warner Brothers

KMFDM

ADIOS

TVT

ECHO AND THE BUNNYMEN
WHAT ARE YOU GOING TO DO WITH YOUR LIFE?
London/Sire

If anyone had dropped these in front of me without any prep, I figure I'd be able to pull a Johnny Carson Great Karnak — you know, hold the CD to your forehead without playing it, and grandly pronounce: "This stinks." But I did manage to play them, and guess what? All three of these discs aren't bad, and are respectively the best release from each band in many a moon.

I'm finally fetting used to seeing Zeppelin, CSNY and other 70's relics look more like pudgy great uncles than sexy rock stars, but when 80's punk bands start to get long in the tooth, my world is a little shaken. What next —bald Duran Duran? Has it been 18 years since the first Pretenders record? Is it possible that



there is anything left in the cupboard we'd care about?

Well, yes. The 'tenders have delivered their best record since 1983. Since the deaths of the musical core (James Honeyman-Scott and Pete Farndon) in 1982, the Pretenders have been bereft of musical muscle, falling back on Chrissie Hynde's charisma and lyricism to maintain the status quo.

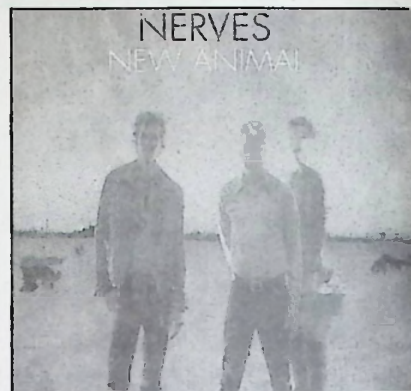
From the cover photo (one of Linda McCartney's last portraits before her death) to the last track, *Viva* is a stripped down lo-fi ride very reminiscent of their first two records. "Who's Who" in particular is a nod to the glory days, echoing "Talk of the Town" as if the intervening two decades were only a short hiatus. (A hearty welcome back to the secret Pretenders chord progression). Fun and poppy without being stupid, the Pretenders have removed pretensions from their repertoire, and the results are worth the adventure.

KMFDM have never gotten the respect in the US that they have in the Euro club scenes. Their melange of industrial, techno and high energy rock/dance was at least a decade ahead of its time, and they influenced a raft of bands that cashed in on their sound. NIN, Ministry and a host of others have taken the blueprints KMFDM lay down and banked a fat roll of cabbage.

Almost forgotten in 1999, KMFDM are still plowing ahead, delivering the goods again and again, no longer really clamoring for any big attention. Still, *Adios* is as good as any of their recent releases, a little slicker perhaps, but solid. Guest vocals from Nina Hagen add to the farewell party atmosphere that pervades this disc. These guys could probably keep doing this until 2025 —shame to leave the field to the imitators. Worth it.

Echo & the Bunnymen, another band that never really cracked America, have been through a lot of tough times since their last successful release, 1984's *Ocean Rain*. *What Are You Going to Do With Your Life?* is very reminiscent of that era: dreamy, heavy strings, I'd almost say Moody Blues-like (but that would send most —including myself— running for the nearest exit). Ian McCulloch and Will Sargeant have put together a pleasing collection here. The obligatory guest help (Fun Lovin' Criminals?) rounds out what is essentially a duo release. It isn't groundbreaking by any stretch of the imagination, but a return to form that has been sadly lacking in the bunnycamp. I guess Ian finally found the missing ingredient: eat, drink, drink, drink and be wary.

- Carwreck deBangs



NERVES
NEW ANIMAL
Thrill Jockey

Twelve blistering tracks with an under three minute average length. I had no idea what I was getting into when *New Animal* was handed to me. My lagging faith in rock-with-an-edge has been no more. The Nerves play music the way race-car drivers, well, *drive*. Fast. Furious. Dangerous. Every god-damned song on this disc is magnificent. Guitarist and singer Rob Datum fills every second with nervous, stomach-turning energy. His guitar is a buzz-saw. His voice a high-pitched wail from the depths of hell. Yeah, sweet like a flower. Bassist and vocalist Seth Skundrick is both fast and melodic. Great underpinning for this power trio that puts the punk back into power. Drummer Elliot Dicks is a wild-man. Does a great job of building tension and directing tempos. Good fills and stays away from that high-hat/snare thing that follows bands like a bad stink.

The first two tracks, "Die Tonight" and "Get Me High" set me on fire, caused me to re-taste my breakfast, and had my dog cowering in the bedroom. "Red Night," "Looking Into Fire," and the epic-length "Twilight Boulevard" (at three minutes and forty-nine seconds) bring the tempo down a notch, but still spit vinegar. "Millstone" rounds out what should be the first side of a record (ah, records). A real slow burn that clocks at fifty-nine seconds. Nice. "Cry, Cry" jumps back into that manic energy and feeds straight into the monster that is "Live All." "Dying Arms" pounds out a mix of cock-rock and classic punk that totally won me over (as if I hadn't already been co-opted). I especially like the background shrieking. "Own Religion" has a real groove, with an almost surf beat, and reminded me a little of the Beach Boys if they had taken a lot of

reviews

Meth. "Carnival Dog" follows up as awe-inspiring as it was disturbing. These guys fill every second. They leave nothing open. My ears hurt. I feel fulfilled. Is my nose bleeding? The disc ends with the title track which could be considered of operatic length. Yes, just over four minutes of mayhem.

The band is joined by Jeremy Jacobsen on electric piano and organ for "Looking Into Fire," "Twilight Boulevard," "Own Religion," and "Carnival Dog." Someone named Azita chants on "Dying Arms." Many dogs join in, barking and howling, on **New Animal**. The disc was recorded in January 99 at Uber Studio Chicago. No production credits are listed, but I'm guessing it was the band.

- Duke Aaron
Il Duce



ATOMIC BITCHWAX ATOMIC BITCHWAX Tee Pee/MIA

Every once in a while a CD comes through that is an unexpected treasure. **Atomic Bitchwax** is one of those releases. An offshoot of Monster Magnet, they are led by lead guitarist Ed Mundell, and create a glorious 70's racket.

Riffs, riffs, riffs. Do ya like riffs? Do ya like Sabbath? Do ya like Tony Iommi's double-tracked leads weaving webs of insanity over Geezer Butler's Jurassic bass-riffs? Do ya like it when Ozzy goes to the bathroom to do blow and lets the boys have an instrumental rip? If you answered yes to any of the above —this record is a must for you.

Relatively unencumbered by vocals, **Atomic Bitchwax** is a tour through your childhood. That is, your childhood if you grew up in the late 70's and early 80's in Redbank, NJ. This is the soundtrack to a Robitussin-gurgling, purple microdot-chomping roadtrip to nowhere —when all that mattered was a

really good buzz. Do you hear the echoes —this is your mind on the little blue kernels you spent all day taking out of Contac capsules, not even sure what they'd do.

In the words of Monster Magnet's Dave Wyndorf: "Here's what you gotta do. Get in your car. Start it up, and then drive it straight into a brick wall. I guarantee you will love it." Recommended.

- Carwreck deBangs



JAZZO TREE LIVE AT THE FIRE & WATER CAFE Self-distributed CD

This disc is a recording of Jazzo Tree's performance at this past year's Northampton Music Festival. It was April 28, a Wednesday, the air had a fine, lilting quality. Jazzo Tree sidled up for a coooooo jazz, hour-ish show. The group consists of; vocalist Richard Pleasant, Colin Black on sax and flute, Josh Schumer on bass (Josh has since been replaced by Chris Crow), J.B. Menides on guitar and percussion, Mary Kennedy- sax and flutes, drums by Doug Murray, keyboards and sax by Ken Laroche, and Theo Moore on percussion. Former Jazzo Tree trombonist Brian Bender sat in on tracks two through six (there

are six tracks in all), and Farlon Black sat in on percussion for track six. Jazzo Tree could be a small nation with this many people and have so many diverse elements fused into their sound, that they are, for sure, a real melting pot.

The recording quality could be a little more focused, but with Richard's banter and the sounds of a live audience you can close your eyes and be in this small performance space, digging the show, and settling into some serious grooves. The disc opens with a seven-minute intro that really showcases some of the great talent here. I was impressed by everyone, but the flute work on all of these tunes really captivated my attention. The second track, "Him," gets into the socio-political nature Richard Pleasant is known for and sends a progressive vibe, while still tearing shit up musically. Track three is a re-work of Traffic's "The Low Spark of High Heel Boys," switched around and focused on those social power brokers like Falwell and the like who don't wear platform shoes but maybe oughtta; the tune clocks in at ten-plus minutes. A ferocious play on melody and counter-melody throughout. "Dances on Yellow" is next at seven minutes and brings things back to a little sweetness. This creates a nice segue into "Intergalactical Jazzy Love Journey." The band proudly claims a legacy from musical and transcendental genius, Sun Ra, and pay a well deserved and well performed composition in his "space-jazz" style. My favorite track. This live show closes out with "The Question" at a whopping fifteen minutes plus. The jams are unable to be denied. Everyone becomes a monster here and the crowd response is great (as it is throughout the disc). Pleasant's vocals beg the image of sixties Village/Beat jazz, sometimes reminiscent of Don Byron's latest stuff and very cool, urban, and interesting. The group as a whole work together seamlessly and put on a sparkling and dynamic performance. This disc is a musical snapshot and like all special photos, will become even more special through the years.

For booking or ordering info: call (413) 582-0696.

- Duke Aaron
Il Duce



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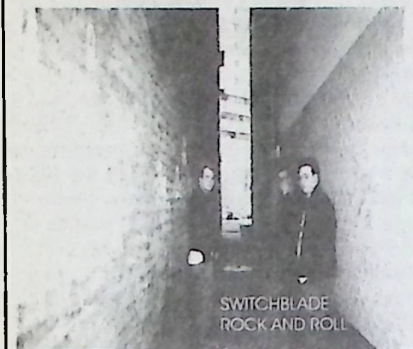
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THE HOWARDS



The Howards SWITCHBLADE ROCK AND ROLL Self-distributed CD

Woah! A Valley band that doesn't take itself too seriously? The Howards just put out ten tracks of rock that isn't looking for artistic credit, just fun. Irreverent punk throw-backs still have a place in our world, apparently. Yeah, I must tell you that The Ramones have nothing to worry about, although track one, "Retard Au-Go-Go," gives it a real shot. "Surfs Up" blisters past you and right into my number one song on Switchblade Rock and Roll, "Sara." Stalkers have a bad rap, and I swear I've been home all night officer. Track four reminds me of my marriage and is aptly called "Jumped by Love" (just kidding, my sweet Cookie). The heartwarming and transcendently rending "Bulimia Girl" is up next and the sweet refrain of "bulimia girl, bulimia girl, bulimia girl..." brought tears to my eyes. Equally poignant is "Suzydice," track six. "I Don't Wanna Be Nuthin" touches at the heart of society's decline: As more of American youth sees what super-productivity has done to fuck up two generations, desire to better oneself is lost. Socially and politically relevant material from The

Howards. "Cadaver" reminds me of me, or one of the many me's.

When I first listened to the disc, I was unimpressed, but with more attention spent, I realized The Howards were really speaking to my sorry-ass, whitebread, waste of a self. The penultimate, "Lost Your Chance," brings the energy to a frothy boil and kicks some real basic punk angst. The disc closes with "3-D Drive-In Movie." Reminded me a bit of The Dickies and captured some of that low-class Americana stuff from the fifties that sells for so much in Japan these days.

I won't pretend that **Switchblade Rock and Roll** is some ground-breaking thing. I will tell you that it is, however, fun. The quality is good as it was recorded at Westfield's Zing Studios by Jim Fogarty and therefore really kicks. The Howards are: Danny on bass and vocals, Timmy on guitar and vocals, and Stiv on drums and... ah... vocals. You can contact the Howards at: The Howards, 136 Woodland Dr, Hampden MA 01036; DANNYDIX@AOL.COM; or call Stiv at 543-9993. Definitely DIY and definitely a band to check out, although, you should walk away quickly if you meet them in a dark alley or something.

- Duke Aaron

Il Duce

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THE COOPERS



AMERICAN CAR

THE COOPERS AMERICAN CAR Chunk Records

I'm a little surprised at the quality of the material on **American Car**, as this band has only been around since '98. The Coopers are good and rockin' and the ten tracks on this, their first release, showcase some pretty tight, interesting, and exciting musicians. There are a few bugs in the system though. The polite word is "derivative." A lot of the tunes, while showing talent, also show the HEAVY

reviews

influences these guys are working under: The Who, Velvet Underground, Bowie, Buzzcocks, a little Sham 69, and some other stuff thrown in. The faux Brit-speak thing is a tad much, but even with all that said, this disc really won me over. The Coopers pull it off and pull it off well. Good songs recorded by talented musicians tend to overcome any obstacle — even obstacles the artists build for themselves. There's no surprise to me that Steve Wardlaw (Marshes' guitarist) heard The Coopers and wanted to record them. It is also no surprise that Mal Thursday (Chunk Records & everything else) wanted to release the disc. A powerful debut, weaknesses excepted.

"Breakfast Club" opens the disc with a frantic energy and segues nicely into the title track, which continues the energy, and yet still leaves room for wailing, screeching guitar feedback. "Moonlit Sun" follows and shows off a real pop-sensibility without losing any authenticity of message. "Rob Shaw Blues" comes back down to earth and totally captivated me. Track five, "Oblivious," also did a strong job towards making me a fan. "Deja Vu" shows The Coopers' big problem, sounding more like The Who than The Who ever did (no surprise The Coopers played The Who at the recent Limeypalooza). "New Hesitation" brings us back onto solid ground. A little bit too much later-Velvets, but a good tune. "New York" follows, also with a thick Velvets sound, but kicks the energy way up. Track nine, "Sleepwalk," is a re-mixed tune from The Coopers demo and a nice ballad song. It also sets up the last track perfectly: "Worst Gig in the Sun" is a live track from last spring and while it sucks in terms of quality it does let the listener know that the stories of The Coopers' manic energy and live performances are absolutely true — like lightning.

The Coopers are going to be one of those few bands that put out a sophomore release that blows everyone away. When they've been together longer and find their voice a little more, these four mop-topped lads are gonna kick some serious ass. **American Car** will stand as a testament to a great band's infancy. The Coopers are: Jedediah Cooper on vocals and guitar, T.B. Cooper on bass and back-grounds, J.J. Dale on drums and back-grounds, and Kenneth Dale on guitar.

(Chunk Records, POB 244, Easthampton, MA 01027)

- Duke Aaron
Il Duce



JESSICA KONZ RESTLESS TIMES New Groove Records

She's from Williamsburg, she's seventeen, cute as a button, and she's just put out her first CD, **Restless Times**. Folksy and poppy love songs, primarily; some sad, all hopeful. Makes me wish I were seventeen again.

How is it? Well, there's a great rap of sorts on track 5, "Come With Me," that captures the sentiment of the disc title, at least with regards to being a seventeen year-old. I don't know what's so restless about most of the songs though, since they're all love songs, and yeah yeah I know love can be restless but still. There's some truly excellent self-chorusing in the first song "All I Want," that's been haunting me all day (thank you, Jessica, for exorcising "Mi Vida Loca" from my cranium, stuck there since watching the MTV Music Awards over a week ago).

Yeah, there are some great moments on this disc. However.

However, says here that "All songs © 1999 John R. Crowley" whom, I assume, is the same Jack Crowley credited on the disc with guitar, bass, electronic programming, and mixing and mastering. Meaning, I further assume, that he's the mastermind (I use the term loosely) behind all this, writing the arrangements and lyrics, buying lunch at the Miss Flo, whatever. Meaning, frankly, that I wish this were truly a Jessica Konz recording; her songs, her lyrics: Jessica in control. But hey Janet Jackson didn't take control of her career until what, something like her third or fourth solo disc (the aptly named **Control**). This is my main

gripe: Jessica's got an awesome voice, sweet, full, always pleasant, sometimes sultry (can't wait 'til she starts drinking whiskey, giving her voice a bit of raspy weariness), with good range for her age; yet this wonderful voice is trapped in (although not quite lost in) run-of-the-mill arrangements and hackneyed instrumentation (the 80's synth flourishes in the background of "Come With Me" are downright embarrassing). Lose Crowley on your next one, J.C. And get a drummer; the brittle sterile anorexic drum machine is a distraction that only serves to weaken things, especially on the otherwise very solid "When I See You."

Coolness: you can check out Jessica's video of "True Love" at www.newgroove.com. **Restless Times** should be available (better be!) at most local music stores, as well as the Williamsburg Pharmacy.

Looking forward to your next disc; may it truly be your own.

- Murphy

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wise alec

WISE ALEC'S RANDOM SUMMER ROUNDUP

BY Alec Drouin

Well, it was a kooky and chaotic summer, but it feels good to be back in the Valley again. Lotsa stuff to cover, so let's go...

Foggy memories: Let's see, I vaguely remember seeing the **Unband** at Grandstands before leaving for the summer — July maybe? Anyway, this was their last local performance before setting out for a summer-long tour. Recently signed to TVT Records, the Unband have finally harnessed their endearing chaos into a tight and devastating set list. Originals and metal covers ("Sweet Emotion," "Whole Lotta Rosie," "Everybody Wants You") blended seamlessly into a ride that is nearly irresistible. If you ever counted yourself among the unbelievers, go again when you get the chance, you will be converted...

A more recent highlight was the current transperformance at Look Park, **Limeypalooza**. An event featuring local bands pretending to be others within an overall theme — this year the glory of Brit rock n' roll was celebrated. Many bands participated, with varying degrees of success, but all were caught up in the spirit of the day. Appearances by the Who,

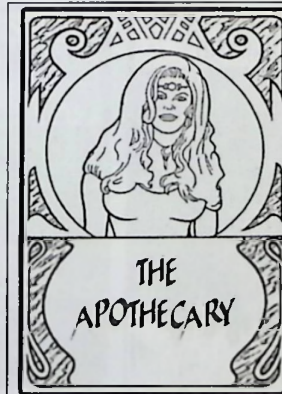
Pink Floyd, the Animals, the Rolling Stones, T Rex, the Beatles (from several different eras), the Sex Pistols, and Elvis Costello only covered about half of the day. Gary Glitter (**John Allen** from the **Big Bad Bollocks**) roamed the festival in an improbable glam outfit... Patsy and Eddie from AbFab, Monty Python (sort of)... Some highlights:

The Drunk Stuntmen's version of Pink Floyd's *The Wall* had the **Young at Heart Chorus** holding their hands over their ears, a thumping Led Zep and a pumping Eurhythmics got ya movin' got ya movin', and **Tag Sales'** Pistols brought just a hint of anarchy and danger. The most moving moment however, was the aforementioned Young at Heart Chorus' version of Led Zeppelin. Driven by a lone accordion, the choir of septuagenarians filed in an eerie procession onto the stage, decked in white robes (nurses for the women, white capped patients for the men). The nearly a capella version of "Stairway to Heaven" was a wryly ironic choice for the band on stage considering their average age, but there was an air of earnestness that invested the performance with a strangely gripping quality. You wanted to laugh, but the arrangement and choreography wouldn't let you do anything but stand there with your mouth open. Brilliant!

The next week, elements of Limeypalooza were recreated in the more friendly confines of the Bay State Hotel. A full bill was tipped off by **Paul** from **Architectural Metaphor's** solo synth performance from *Dark Side of the Moon*, tight and scary. **King Radio's** Elvis Costello and the **Cooper's** Who both benefit-

ed from the smaller room, and **Mal Thursday's** Eric Burdon worked the crowd like the real thing. The evening was brought to a close by **Aloha Steamtrain's** Beatles. Very tight and powerful, the Steamtrain benefit from already having some Beatles stuff in their normal set. Slick and pro, most especially "The Rain Song." A more-than-packed house reveled until the wee hours of a Tuesday morn.

The Ray Mason Band delivered a nice set on a recent Friday night, augmented by three(!) guitarists, including the **Bottle Rockets'** producer **Eric "Roscoe" Ambel**. Muscular and dangerous sounds were buried beneath the seemingly tame song structures. Like REM circa *Murmur* or *Reckoning*, it's Americana with a snarl. If you haven't seen Ray lately, then you haven't seen Ray... mo' later fer ya, ok?



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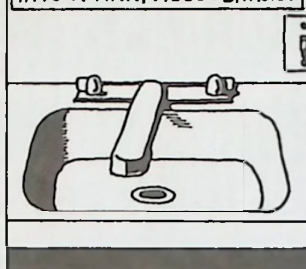
Alligator Comics, part 2

by the Rev. Lee Joseph Day

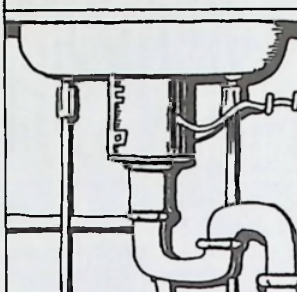
IN A SUPER SECRET LABORATORY ON THE OUTSKIRTS OF TOWN A MOUSE IS INJECTED WITH A SECRET FORMULA.



THE MOUSE WAS ACCIDENTALLY DROPPED INTO A GARBAGE DISPOSE-ALL AND GROUND INTO A PINK, VISCOUS, PASTE.



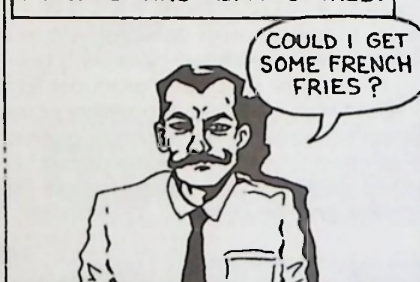
PLUMBERS FROM M.I.T. WERE ABLE TO RECOVER THE PASTE FROM THE DRAIN TRAP.



AT WHICH TIME THE PASTE WAS SHAPED INTO A PATTY, FRIED IN A PARTICLE ACCELERATOR, GARNISHED, AND SERVED ON A SESAME SEED BUN.



THE SANDWICH WAS FED TO A LABORATORY EMPLOYEE BY THE NAME OF RAY, AND A MILD LAXATIVE WAS ADMINISTERED.



COULD I GET SOME FRENCH FRIES?

RAY'S FECES WERE COLLECTED THE NEXT MORNING AND EXPOSED TO GAMMA RADIATION AND THE MOUSE WAS RETURNED TO LIFE WITH THE AID OF MICROSURGERY AND VOODOO...



ENOUGH WITH THE SCIENTIFIC MUMBO JUMBO, LET'S GET BACK TO THE MAIN STORY.



WHY DO I HAVE TO BE IN THE PANEL NEXT TO THE SHIT JAR?

MEANWHILE, A HAPLESS DWARF IS LOST IN THE WOODS NEARBY.



100 YARDS AWAY, THE SCENT OF MIDGET REACHES THE SENSITIVE NOSTRILS OF ONE OF NATURE'S MOST EFFICIENT KILLING MACHINES.



CRUNCH!



THEN SHE PUT THE WHOLE MIDGET INTO THE MICRO-WAVE. MY MICROWAVE!

NATURALLY I WAS PIST.



I SAID: "ALLIGATOR! YOU'RE SO STUPID! YOU DON'T PUT DWARVES IN MY MICROWAVE, IT'S ONLY FOR PEOPLE FOOD!"

JERK!



THEN THE ALLIGATOR CUT OFF THE DWARF'S HEAD AND SHOVED IT TWO OR THREE FEET UP MY RECTUM...



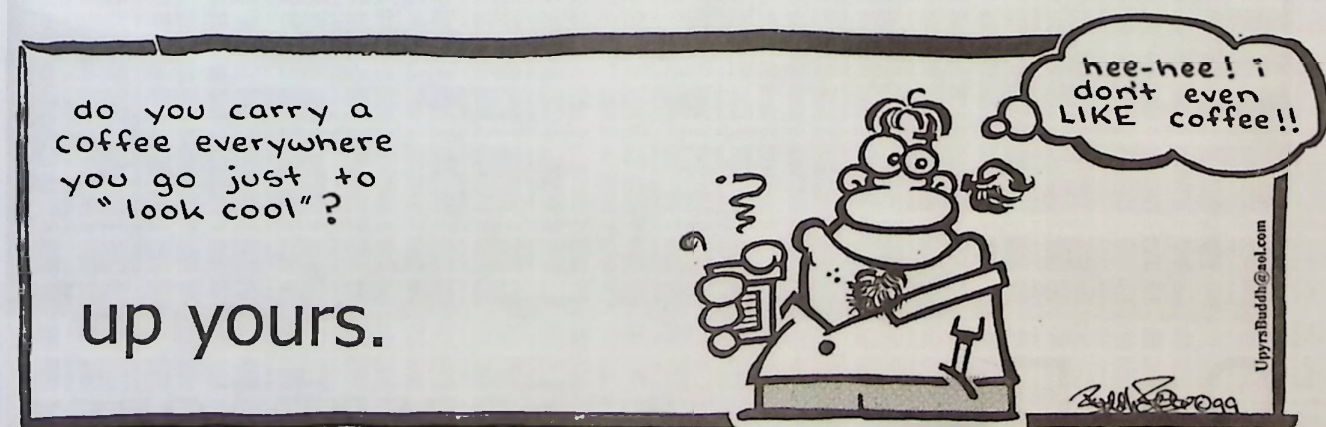
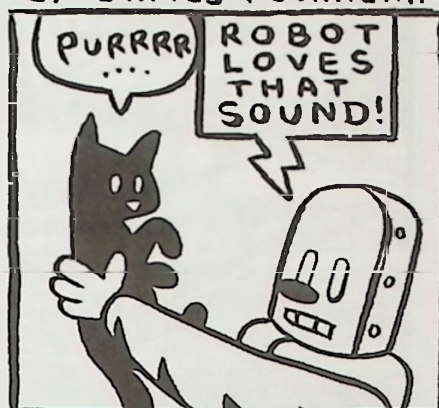
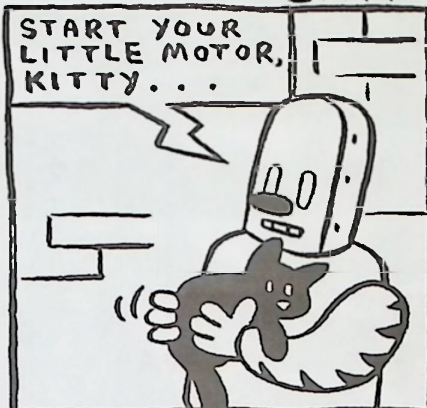
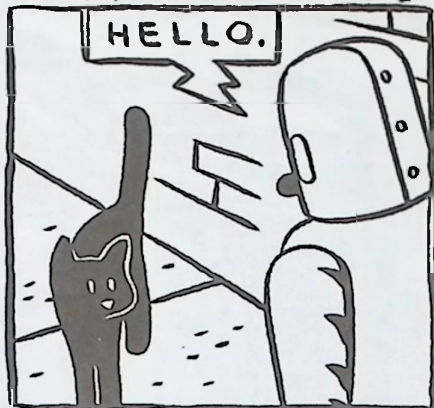
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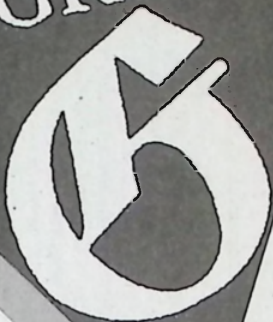
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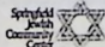
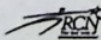


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The backstory: adopted by United Methodist Church missionary parents in New Delhi and raised in Kentucky and Manitoba; twenty-seven year-old alt-rockers with saucer-shaped eyes, Cleopatra cut, lip rings, tattoos (the Cantonese symbol for The Way on one shoulder; the Egyptian Eye of Horus and the Sanskrit Om on the other); described by Elle magazine as the "bastard child of Courtney Love and Marilyn Manson," something I wouldn't even apply to Freddy Krueger.

I Murficus make the observation that no wonder Bif Naked was the head-turner at this year's Lilith Fair: in the sea of fair-skinned (read: white) nice (even my mom owns a Sarah M disc) homogenized (read: white) alternachicks, there was no way Bif could not stand out: metal riffs, shuffling beats, fast beats, take-no-shit lyrics, strong vocals all her own. Bif rocks; simple as that.

FREESTYLERS WE ROCK HARD

Mammoth



This one reminds me of so many good things: Public Enemy, Utah Saints (whatever happened to?), *The Matrix*, *Power Puff Girls*, solo late night drives along the Mass Pike, Jirn Beam, unmentionable guilty pleasures. A soundtrack for any and all of the above.

Buy this CD right now. Especially if the M/A/R/R/S single "Pump Up the Volume" rocked your world back in nineteen eighty whatever. Likewise if you're a fan of early Public Enemy, as this disc's "Freestyle Noize" borrows so heavily from PE's "Bring The Noise," "Caught, Can We Get A Witness" and "Show 'Em Whatcha Got" that it may as well be a PE medley-remix. Some good skanking dancehall raps reminiscent of early Big Audio Dynamite, too. And the old school scratching takes me back...

KOOL KEITH BLACK ELVIS/ LOST IN SPACE

Ruffhouse/Columbia



Bugged-out hip-hop multiple personality (who records under the personae Dr. Octagon, Dr. Doom, Kool Keith) Keith Thornton is back with his second Kool Keith effort, *Black Elvis/Lost In Space*, his like second or third release of the past year.

Any disc that opens with the line, "This is the intro" and means it is bound to be whacked and **BE/LIS** is seriously so, at least lyrically (the sci-fi send-ups are sharp, the stories insane) but it's the beats and bass, deep and fu-unky, that rocket this disc out of the known universe. Buy a plastic Elvis wig, put this disc on the car player, and go for a hyper-drive.

LAMB

FEAR OF FOURS

Fontana/Mercury



British duo of Andrew Barlow and Louise Rhodes' second release of atmospheric drum and bass (he) and thin-yet-smoky vocals (she) that again pushes and/or blurs the line between interesting and snooze inducing.

At times *Fear of Fours* is frantic, original, inspired ("Little Thing," "B Line," "Alien") but more often than not it sounds like any other bass and drum group with a waifish female vocalist and jazzy pretensions. So, yeah, buy it and tape the best cuts — but only buy it used, on sale, or at a five-finger discount.

<p>LUNAR DRIVE ALL TOGETHER HERE Beggars Banquet</p>		<p>A fusion of Native American (three of the four members are NA; the fourth, a Brit) chants and beats, hip-hop, electronica, techno, sampling, politics; we have met the Great Kitchen Sink and it is us.</p>	<p>Y'know, if it wasn't for the we-are-the-world and the great-mother-is-hurtin' English-spoken lyrics on half of the cuts, this would be a great dance/driving disc: the NA chanting is mysterious and compelling; the beats like Great Plains weather, building slowly or appearing suddenly out of nowhere, far off or thunderously close. Yeah, buy it and tape the better half, but ask yourself this: how does it play on the Res? (My bet is that it don't, that Lunar Drive's appeal is to multicultural-hugging calous-free honkeys. Limp Biz, Lauryn, Busta; betcha.)</p>
<p>MR. BUNGLE CALIFORNIA Warner Bros.</p>		<p>Faith No More may be history but gonzo singer Mike Patton lives on in Mr. Bungle, the band for those of us who have a love-hate relationship with rock. Mediculous arrangers that would make Zappa proud between giggling fits, Mr. B are helter-skelter Dadaists, jumping and mixing genres within songs with what seems like wild abandon, but it ain't stoopid-wild, there's big brains behind it. And it works: the pseudo-tango faux-metal, false-jazz, sorta-lounge, semi-surf, bastard-Beach Boys, etc.; all of it jump-cut, juxtaposed, and laced (like microdot party punch) with Patton's honest-to-Damone Vegas crooning.</p>	<p>Highly recommended for the jaded, the near-dead, and everyone else who's sick of the same old, same old.</p>
<p>THE RED KRAYOLA FINGERPAINTING Drag City</p>		<p>Conceptual, cerebral, ex-psychedlic, post-punk, the former Red Krayola (oh those lawyers at Crayola Crayons) are still at it after 34 years, still avant-garde, still experimenting, still funkling with structure and still with Mayo Thompson helming as Captain Kirk, boldly taking us to into new soundscapes within the four-minute rock-like song. -Like being the operative dangling suffix, since Mayo's vocals are sometimes hissed-with, sometimes sung to himself, the drums seem to be coming both from the room you're in and the dumpster across the street at the same time, people talk, guitars squawk and pop, pianos and accordians tinkle and moo and... and yet it's all so... cohesive, and pleasantly so.</p>	<p>This is the kind of music David Byrne coulda woulda shoulda made before he got sucked into the twister of funk, the sounds from way down south. Buy this; it's Art, and Art is good for you.</p>
<p>SOUL ECSTASY SOUNDTRACK Emperor Norton</p>		<p>This is the soundtrack to a 1972 film that no longer exists except in script form, assorted stills and production shots. Honest. Sez so right here in the press release. Apparently the film's heavy mixture of Black Panther and Red Chinese politics, of whitebread girls kidnapped to work whorehouses and whitebread boys drugged and turned into lispng drag queens, was too much for The Man and so the film was shut down. Apparently the Blaxploitation-Ed Woodish crossover potential was lost on the AMC and Showcase exhibitors of the time, bad not yet being good. The soundtrack survived, though, recorded by the Inner Thumb, a group that existed only so long as to record this music. Sad, so sad.</p>	<p>Curtis Mayfield and Isaac Hayes ain't got nothin' on the Inner Thumb: this is one of the most consistently funky soundtracks ever recorded, one groove slipping into another, one city street crossing to the next, and the fact that the Thumb at times mixes East-meets-West (the two main film locations being Hong Kong and New York) instrumentation puts them well ahead of the curve of today's hip-hop stylists. Bottom line: one helluva good funk album. In a perfect world Tarantino would remake the film, just because I miss Pam Grier.</p>
<p>TAKAKO MINEKAWA XIMER Emperor Norton</p>		<p>This is a remix of Takako Minekawa's Cloudy Cloud Calculator album (haw: ximer is remix backwards), with eight of CCC's cuts reinterpreted by the likes of Cornelius, Kid Loco, Sweet Trip and Nobukazu Takekura, amongst others. The results: not as mixed as is all-too-common on remix albums. The sweetness of Takako's vocals remain intact, as do her unique compositional forays, even re-worked as they are here for the dancefloor or headphones.</p>	<p>If you're into the whole Takako Minekawa-Cornelius (early) Pizzicato Five-Kahimi Karie-nineties Japanese school of lounge-experimental-childish-dance-hentai-meets-hip-hop then Ximer is for you. If you wanna be turned onto the above whatever then this is a good intro, offering a variety of styles while still remaining true to Takako's voice. The Kid Loco remix of "Black Forest" alone is worth the price of the EP.</p>



NEW on video
OCTOBER

EXISTENZ

Jennifer Jason Leigh stars as Allegra Geller, a world-renowned video game designer whose latest invention literally plugs the player (using a fleshy umbilical cord jacking into a "bioport" drilled into the base of the player's spine) into a deadly virtual reality experience. Co-star Jude Law is along for the ride as Geller's protector and fellow player, eluding an apparent competing corporate power's bid to off Geller and demolish her new game, *Existenz*, before it reaches the market. Sadly, *EXISTENZ*'s limited theatrical run paled in the box office wake of similar "virtual reality" fare like *THE MATRIX* and *THE THIRTEENTH FLOOR*. For fans of director David Cronenberg (*VIDEODROME*, *NAKED LUNCH*, *CRASH*), this is tepid warmed-over soup: Cronenberg's led us down this road before, and it's become familiar turf for aficionados, from the imagery of pulsing biomechanical devices and flesh-guns to the constantly shifting planes of perceived reality. For the uninitiated, however, this is decidedly different fare, uncompromisingly audience-unfriendly as it calculatedly disorients the viewer, providing a spellbinding, mind-bending rollercoaster ride that provides an ideal intro to Cronenberg's inventive, obsessive cinematic universe.

- S.R. Bissette

DETOUR

John's brother Joey Travolta does a competent job helming this modest rural crime thriller in which on-the-skids thief (Jeff Fahey) is set up by mob scumbag (Gary Busey) to rob a mob boss' front business — after Busey has already cleaned out the safe. On the lam, caught between the mob, a suspicious brother-in-law who happens to be his hometown's sheriff (Michael Madsen sleepwalking through another role), his partners itching for one more score, and a family legacy that includes a daughter he didn't know was his and the ball-and-chain of a dairy farm (cue feel-good country-rock score), Fahey fries. While this film uneasily straddles gritty shoot-'em-up violence and sticky sentimentality, and the soundtrack music is obtrusive, it's still a pleasant evening diversion.

- S.R. Bissette

THE DREAM LIFE OF ANGELS

French director Erick Zonca's first film feels more like a plunge into the icy light of day, but the dive is definitely worth it. Happenstance turns two female drifters, Isa and Marie, into friends and roommates. Powerful performances make their working class struggles honorable, even haunting.

- Brooks Robards

MY NAME IS JOE

—and, yes, I'm an alcoholic, but I'm fighting it. Joe's off-again on-again romance with a community health worker and his coaching for a local football team help him survive the dregs of Glasgow. British director Ken Loach gives us the story straight with no chasers. If you can handle the grimness, it's a good one.

- Brooks Robards

ELECTION

Reese Witherspoon and Matthew Broderick lock horns in this sublime satire of American culture. She's the teen hell-bent on winning the high school election, and he's the history teacher determined to stop her, no matter how. Director Alexander Payne (*CITIZEN RUTH*) has honed his comedic skills till they're so sharp you hardly realize you've been cut down to size.

- Brooks Robards

THE RAGE: CARRIE 2

Another teen carnage epic, which did well in theaters despite the critical pasting it received for its derivation from Brian De Palma's bracing adaptation of the original Stephen King novel *CARRIE* (which, by the way, deservedly netted an Academy Award nomination for its star Sissy Spacek) and the shadow of *Columbine* that further tarred its reputation. Hey, it scored at the box office because it's a pretty good little shocker, not just a retread of its namesake and, unlike *THE FACULTY* or *DISTURBING BEHAVIOR* (both good films, too), *THE RAGE* has some real meat on its bones. Director Katt Shea (formerly Katt Shea Rubin) takes the material seriously, coaxing strong performances from the cast in archetypal roles all concerned could have stumbled through; orchestrating potent setpieces that use the genre language to confront genuine issues of teenage and gender anxiety, confusion, and anger; and building upon real case histories of communities tolerating (even encouraging) high school sports stars "date rapes" to question authority and adult misperceptions of the piranha-pit pressure-cookers all too many school environments have become. Director Shea is an exploitation filmmaker deserving of more attention; she went from the grind of acting in a couple Roger Corman T&A potboilers to directing Corman T&A programmers (*STRIPPED TO KILL 1 and 2*, etc.), graduating to the majors with the steamy Drew Barrymore vehicle *POISON IVY*.

With Emily Bergl, Jason London, Zachary Ty Bryan.

- S.R. Bissette

PIRATES OF SILICON VALLEY

Engaging, ultimately devastating chronology of the rise and rise of Bill Gates (former Brat-Packer Anthony Michael-Hall giving the best performance of his adult career) and rise and corporate consumption of Steve Jobs (Noah Wyle, shamelessly fickle and riveting throughout). Given the constraints of the medium and prescribed running time (this was originally made-for-cable), this is a meticulously crafted and surprisingly lucid dissection of the personalities and power struggles relevant to the explosive emergence of the new personal computer technologies, and the toll it exacted in human terms from those involved behind the closed doors. Sure, power corrupts, but this film persuasively argues that the seeds of success and tragedy were visible long before either Gates or Jobs became public figures, tracing their intertwined fates from their threadbare roots in the college dorms, to the high-tech piracy and power-brokering that made their fortunes. This is a great docudrama; it doesn't sweep the real issues under the carpet to play it safe, and scores with wit, clarity, and gripping immediacy. Area residents can only hope the case history of the **TEENAGE MUTANT NINJA TURTLES** is as well told one day. Highly recommended!

- S.R. Bissette

PUSHING TIN

Great cast elbows their way through a quirky mix of cutting-edge black comedy (in the airport control rooms, as overworked air controllers recklessly gamble with plane routes and the lives of thousands day in, day out) and increasingly annoying soap opera hysterics (the fallow and frayed home life with ignored, bored, restless, and understandably fed-up spouses and sexual partners). Based on an article by journalist Darcy Frey, whose main points (air controller working conditions and attendant lifestyles can be dangerous) are undermined by the Hollywood formulas imposed on this lethal concoction. With John Cusack, Billy Bob Thornton, Cate Blanchett.

- S.R. Bissette

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GOOD had WITCH WITCH

THE BLAIR WITCH PROJECT:

Two Views

GOOD WITCH

It seems that every generation embraces a low-budget independent horror film that literally crawls out of the woodwork, unbidden by the Hollywood powers-that-be, as its choice collective nightmare — to be terrified by or reviled, with no middle ground possible between these emotional polar-opposite reactions. The detractors lambaste the nightmare as irrational, senseless, repulsive, offensive, and pointless, while those unable to shake its impact spread the word, building the buzz and a cult following. In the 1940's, it was Val Lewton's horror-by-suggestion gems like *THE CAT PEOPLE*; in the 1950's, *I WAS A TEENAGE WEREWOLF* and *INVASION OF THE BODY SNATCHERS*. In the early 1960's, it was *PSYCHO* (yes, it's Hitchcock, but it was refused by his home studio, Universal, produced via Hitchcock's TV unit in black and white and picked up by a rival studio). For my generation, it was George Romero's *NIGHT OF THE LIVING DEAD* (1968), which broke all the rules.

I caught *NIGHT OF THE LIVING DEAD* with my high-school sweetheart and a close friend who provided the wheels to get us there; half-way through the film, my friend providing the ride stormed out, furious at the movie, threatening to abandon us at the theater and, during the climax, my overwhelmed girlfriend was in tears and I escorted her out to the lobby, where I had to beg them both to stay put so I could watch the last few minutes. It

collective nightmare of the moment, eschewing the graphic horrors of prior collective nightmares and embracing the less-is-more aesthetic of the Val Lewton films — it's what you don't see, what you CAN'T see, that scares you (the same aesthetic, by the way, that informs the current hit *THE SIXTH SENSE*). It clearly addresses many of this generation's fears in their own terms.

True to form, *BLAIR WITCH* also invites the derision of those who (for whatever reason) do not fall under its spell. There's no arguing the point: it either scares you or it doesn't, and there are no rational explanations or arguments that will sway either camp. It is, by definition, an irrational, emotional experience; a "weird tale" in the classic sense, enhanced (and hyped) by the inventive subtextual environment crafted for it online, creating a new "urban legend" grounded in historical fiction. Love it or loathe it, *BLAIR WITCH* was the event film of 1999, made by and for its own generation, and — like its precursors — it has made its mark in the collective imagination and confounded executives and its detractors by breaking all the rules governing what a horror film and box office hit "should" be.

Unlike *VMag's* fearless editor and many of my friends, I loved it. Sure, this isn't as original a conceit as fans of the film would argue: Italian director Ruggero Deodato's harrowing "found-footage mockumentary" *CANNIBAL HOLOCAUST* (1981) covered similar ground, and the illusory "you are there" film reality is arguably an extension of

was a miserable ride home, but I had never been so scared by a movie in my life. For the 1970's, it was *THE TEXAS CHAINSAW MASSACRE* and *ERASERHEAD*; for the 1980's, *HALLOWEEN* and *THE EVIL DEAD*. We were due for fresh blood, and it just arrived.

Clearly, *THE BLAIR WITCH PROJECT* is the

the European Dogma 95 school (*CELEBRATION*, etc.). Yes, the film feeds upon and induces an irrational fear of the wilderness: so did *DELIVERANCE*, *THE TEXAS CHAINSAW MASSACRE* (Texas BBQ, anyone?) and most classics of the backwoods horror genre. Agreed, the trio of students act like idiots (no boy scouts in this bunch: follow the damned stream, you boneheads!) and sure have healthy camera batteries when food seems wanting. But for the duration of its running time, it worked for me, and still does.

- S.R. Bissette

BAD (BLEAH) WITCH

Great title — too bad the movie is such a rip-off. So how come this amateurish excursion into pseudo-documentary witch-hunting racked up great notices at the Sundance Film Festival and well over \$120 million at the box office? Who knows what feeds the public's paranoia — take *THE X FILES* — but Internet buzz got the ball rolling. Then a summer season without any real Hollywood blockbusters whetted audiences' appetites for something offbeat.

BLAIR's three filmmakers, who set off through the wilds of Maryland in search of a legendary witch, don't have a clue about how to survive in the woods, let alone make a decent movie. The only convincing part comes when the movie persuades us that these three amateurs disappeared without a trace. It didn't take a witch to finish them off. Any self-respecting bear, bobcat or cougar could have done the job.

We've all gotten so conned into thinking blurry shots, whiplash pans and shaky camerawork mean "Art" that we're ready to believe Emperor *BLAIR* does have her clothes on. But are the outdoors all that scary? The movie's scenes of witchcraft at work seem childish at best. Heather's bossy. Josh and Mike are plain whiney. They deserve what they got.

The irony is that one very good summer exercise in terrifying mindgames, *ARLINGTON ROAD*, bombed at the box office. And the Bruce Willis vehicle *SIXTH SENSE* makes for one of the best excursions into the paranormal to come out of Hollywood in a long time. If *THE BLAIR WITCH PROJECT* represents the cream of Independent filmmaking's current crop, it's time to stop complaining about Hollywood trash.

- Brooks Robards

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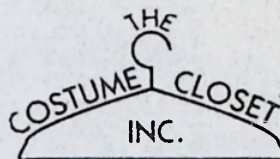


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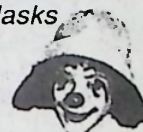


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—ROBERT TOBEY

DO TH PROTEST A BIT MUCH?

All the front-page shrieking and moaning that announced the arrival of the Massport Scandal had me confused at first—so loud and yet so petty—but I soon figured it out. The bluff and high-dudgeon being delivered by all parties—the naughty boaters, their horrified political bosses and associates, the scoffing reporters—was the red-herring rhetoric of overcompensation, the shrill pitch of outrage that can't quite cover the lingering odor of something concealed. And what was being concealed by all the fuss and bluster is that this shit—the freebies, the perks, the junkets, the large and small privileges and tradings of power—happens all the time in politics and commerce, in our American politics of commerce, every day and in a thousand ways. It's just that it's supposed to happen more discreetly and decorously, by the book, and in accordance with code. What really pissed people off was not that Blute and Tennant and crew had done something so very awful or so very out of the ordinary—a little boat ride of flimsy validity at negligible taxpayer expense (you're going to tell me such things are so unusual?)—but that he had been so stupid about it, so bold and unpretending. That out of heedless arrogance it ended up looking too much like what it was, and what it always is. I think what really spooks the pols and the moneyed-interests when this kind of insider bungling occurs is that it threatens to give the whole game away. And then it's really just a matter of pack survival for the rest of the tainted gang to come forward in full public view, upright and rigid with indignation, to beat the dumb transgressor to death, to venomously

stigmatize, sequester like a leper, and deliver a violent moral corrective. For this not only provides a good purging, an uplifting scapegoating entertainment for a sleepwalking public, but serves more importantly as a useful distraction from discovery of similar and widespread corruptions that we live with and pay for every day, such as: How many years and tens of millions of dollars will we be overextended on the Big Dig by the time it's finally dug? Funny how all those private contractors, expert as they are in their trade, could get it so very very profitably wrong?

As far as the newspapers went, and the tropisms they love, it was the brazen bare-breasted babe (whose name was Churchill, no less!) that put it over the top and made it, if not truly worthy, then irresistible as a front cover sensation (with reporters casting themselves in the role of dauntless crusaders, staunch guardians of the public purse and the fragile morality of the State). In weak justification, in words that were a kind of winking to the public, the *Boston Globe* was forced to resort to prissy and moldy old Boston newspaper locutions like: "scantily-clad women," and a more modern but no less prohibition-styled aspersion, "Booze Cruise." And they could do this with a straight face because none of their ride-em-cowboy male reporters have ever been to a strip club, seen a stripper. Oh No No No! And there certainly wouldn't be a female employee that could have possibly ever visited such a place, or—My God No!—been a stripper, or who might possibly be one even now to compensate for low reporter's or secretary's wages? Oh But No No No! One should not even begin to think! And reporters have never had a reputation for drinking, no way! And certainly reporters have never been known to drink on somebody else's tab, or to have gained unpaid entry to clubs and events, or received free things in the mail, or ever gone on travel junkets, just, you know, in the way of encour-

aging a little sympathy, a softer touch, that civilized mutuality, a little of the old strategic eye-to-eye, the tit for tat. Everybody knows there is a very strict code of impartiality which warns against such behavior. Absolutely Not!

Also, newspapers can't resist revealing powerful people in the act of looking stupid (and boy did these guys cooperate), which is okay because of course the stupidity of powerful people should be revealed. However, the way in which the press revels in the stupidity of the powerful, once the blood is running, reveals more about the press than it does the powerful. And what it reveals is the servant's grudge and the servant's fury, an abiding resentment of the enforced historical role of newspapers and their dutiful employees as toady, flak, co-sponsor and promo tool for the powerful, the wealthy, and the celebrities. Slaves, as the Shadow knows, make excellent assassins.

By the way, it's more odious to see the *Globe* play this game; a tarnish on the high polish of their self-regard. We all expect tabloids such as the *Herald* to be shameless, delirious with disinformation.

PS - A couple of the ripper modern touches to this scandal: the effort of the boat people to tie it in to breast cancer research is an irony as awful as it is hilarious; and the new-agey and oh-so-predictable upshot of Mr. Tennant instantly breaking into a weepy and earnest 12-step recovery song and dance. I agree: nobody should go to jail any more; we should all start doing the twelve-step. But please please please - I don't want to hear any more about it.

BEST OF NO GOOD

The results of the *Advocate's* Grand Band Scam—er, Slam—are in, and gone, and the whole business was as depressing, and a good deal more puzzling, than the usual Best Of nonsense. Their big annual Best Of juggernaut, on which the *Advocate* lavishes a ludicrous quantity of aditorial—er, editorial—effort (I would guess that there is as much photo space given over to illustrate the puffery of the Best Of's as there is used to illustrate real stories in 20 normal issues) is in essence a slippery commercial gambit, a shameless orgy of mercenary mutual back-scratching, a huge, rampant—is there no end to the categories you can dream up to

provoke businesses into competing with one another by buying ads in the *Advocate*?— sacred cash cow. All served up dripping a gooey saccharine sauce of populist idealism. This is appropriation in the guise of celebration.

What's puzzling about the Advo's Best Of's for bands is the apparent lack of an obvious commercial angle. You might as well solicit poets for ads. My guess is that now that Northampton has been voted Best Small Arts Town in America, blah blah blah, it's a smart time to start cashing in on the burgeoning arts tourism biz. Also, I suppose, a good way to endear yourself to the culture moguls. Also a convenient fig leaf to cover up relatively pathetic coverage of local music — both the *Union News* and the *Gazette* are now far superior in this realm. Also just a good way to get your big ugly promo banner up behind whoever happens to be on stage.

Musicians being notoriously nondenominational and democratic, if not outright anarchistic, you'd think they'd hold this cheesy sort of popularity contest in contempt. And I imagine on their own time, and amongst themselves, they do. But it's hard to resist the Golden Apple when it's rolled into a room full of poor folk. The *Advocate* knows this and their vast circulation gives them lots of leverage for prodding the herd.

And how are these Best Of things judged, by what criterion, what method? Presented as The Voice Of The People, it's always been, more or less, a craven ballot-stuffing free-for-all. And I glean from the smarmy copy accompanying the announcement of "winners" that once the votes are in, a panel of "experts" (anonymous) review the results to make sure the public got it right. So who gets to pick the "experts" that edit the proudly-vaunted Voice Of The People? Might this method be just a little vague, covert, and potentially corrupt, for determining and broadcasting who is exclusively The Best at something (which by implication denigrates the standing of all others who pursue the same end).

Don't we turn to the arts, in part, to discover variety and difference? Isn't the ideal of the arts that there are as many ways of being good as there are clear-spoken personalities brave enough to take the chance to speak? I don't think the vague and shallow exclusivity of "Best Of" belongs in the arts. In the name of rock and roll, I'd boycott the damn thing.

GOOD AS NEW

On a regular basis now *Rolling Stone* publishes laudatory reviews of music made 3 decades ago —there's Neil Young, smooth of skin, full of hair, unbaggy of eye— illustrating the rerelease (or is it rerererelease?) of his second album, **Everybody Knows This Is Nowhere**. Or the late Skip Spence of Moby Grape, a revered original in the psychedelic basketcase category, getting great reviews for the rerelease of *Oar*, a loopy recording he made in 1970 as he went tripping not so merrily down Crazy Lane. That antiques such as these should be so valued is unheard of in the annals of Hip consumerism. It would be as if the hippie critics at *Rolling Stone* in 1969 had given prominent and loving reviews of Benny Goodman and Frank Sinatra releases from 1939, that hip and dangerous music of our parents. Fat chance! I'm not

sure what this means. Is it that our belief in the advancement of culture has ended, and we now live entirely within the ever-expanding media bubble (belatedly taking along with us Benny Goodman and Frank Sinatra, both recently reconstituted hipsters)? Or is it that anything that can be sold, and resold —recordings and film— now entirely defines what we think of as culture? Or did I just say the same thing twice?

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DAVE BIEDERMAN

MEDIA DOG

Least Competent Running Dog Lackey of the Corporate/Capitalist Stooge Network Bosses

Chuck Shepherd's "News of the Weird," a widely syndicated compendium of offbeat news items that appears locally in the *Valley Advocate*, is perfect fodder for today's corporate media. Reading it, you would think that America's favorite pathologies — idiocy, brutality, violence and greed — are concentrated in individuals at the fringes of society. You would never suspect that those same attributes are the very underpinnings of our prosperity and are found in greater measure in the corridors of power.

Two of Shepherd's favorite targets for ridicule are criminals and convicts. In August, he noted with mirth that a 28-year-old Ontario man stashed cocaine in his pants during a traffic stop, and when the cocaine caught fire, the man began screaming and gave himself up. In the same column, a burglar in Tunja, Colombia who was shot and killed by a nun was deemed worthy of a good guffaw.

Back in July, Shepherd mocked an Ontario convict who sued the correctional facility in which he was incarcerated for \$3,000 when he lost a prison job "aimed at preparing him for work on the outside." Shepherd scorned a June U.S. Supreme Court ruling that videotapes seized from a Georgia child porn suspect could not be used against him because the man had an "expectation of privacy."

Under the heading "Cultural Diversity," Shepherd mocked Hindus and Muslims for using animals in religious ceremonies, and under "Least Competent Criminals," he laughed at a Calgary man was sentenced to a year in prison for submitting false evidence while challenging a traffic ticket.

Other targets for hilarity: criminals who accidentally shoot themselves; rioting prisoners in Brazil demanding pot and alcohol; chastity belts as rape-preventive devices for young women in Thailand; avant-garde art projects made with government grants; a combat bra for women in the Canadian military, and a Florida man who was assaulted by a prostitute when he insulted her as she performed fellatio on him.

I like a good laugh as much as the next wag, but isn't Shepherd aware of the human misery and needless incarceration caused by the war on drugs? Doesn't he know that Amnesty International routinely condemns the inhumane, brutal conditions in U.S. prisons? Is there really a need for another xenophobic syndicated feature?

What appears "weird" to Shepherd — sad and desperate people doing stupid things — is actually the norm. What is really weird are the narrow circumstances under which irreverence is permissible in the media. The most sanctimonious hacks (George W. Bush), hucksters (Bill Bennett), charlatans (Henry Hyde), madmen (Henry Kissinger), crooks (Michael Milkin) and hanging judges (Antonin Scalia) — are treated with deference and respect. Though they are all carica-

tures of themselves, the sort of pompous hypocrites that the once-free press used to pounce upon, they and their ilk can now only be gently chided. It is only little people, and people who cannot further corporate interests, who can be scorned with impunity.

Weirder still is that Shepherd is able to be fobbed off as entertainment. He is a purveyor of corporate doctrine and nothing more. Naturally, so-called frivolous lawsuits and excessive jury awards are a favorite target of Shepherd because "tort reform" — absolute protection for corporations from any accountability for their products or actions — is tops on the corporate wish list. As long as Shepherd furthers that agenda his "weird" little item can be syndicated. "News of the Weird" is one small tool in corporate America's propaganda war to try and whip up public support for "tort reform," and to generally piss on civil rights and the notion that people are not just consumers or misfits, but are capable of dignity and clear thinking.

Conspiracy theory? Wrong, pal; just business as usual in the corporate media.

Eli's Coming

It didn't take Times Mirror long to muck with the newly acquired *Valley Advocate*. On August 12 and again on September 2, columns bearing the byline of one Quinn Eli appeared in the "News and Commentary" section of the now-corporate weekly, bumping Managing Editor Tom Vannah off his usual pulpit. The neo-conservative gibberish that is a staple of U.S. media has finally come home to roost in the Valley, with some unique twists.

In the August 12 piece, "Mixed Doubles," Eli deplores the media's fascination with the "biological origins" of tennis star Samantha Stevens, who was fathered out of wedlock by basketball great Julius Erving. Fair enough, but then he states that the U.S. Open in which Stevens is appearing has become an occasion "to share the thrill of picturing dark skin pressed fully against pale skin in some wild, ecstatic embrace."

Er, ah, okay, Quinn, if you say so. As if more evidence was needed, Eli confesses to enjoying salacious thrills himself but is confused as to why other people would be titillated by interracial sex. Eli, however, appears more titillated than most; in language once again a bit too garish he recalls that when he worked in a video store, sheepish white couples would rent videos depicting "blond starlets being ravaged by, like (sic), the Black Panther Party."

Where is this going? Eli the

heavy breather is lamenting the fact that it is now impolite to discuss the dynamics of racial difference. "Like Adam gazing lasciviously at the apple," writes the scribe, "we are turned on most by that which strikes us as forbidden." That, presumably, is the reason that we — you and I — stare at interracial couples; because, in Eli's words, they are "so far removed from the pale sea of sameness that envelopes (sic) our lives."

"Pale sea of sameness?" Fire the fools at rewrite who let that one pass by.

In his September 2 column, Eli pounded again on the same vague theme. In the name of "facing our differences with less fear," he lamented the fact that the folks who make Crayola crayons changed the name of one crayon color from "Indian Red" to "Chestnut." In Eli's view, that act typifies our tendency to consider any mention of race as an "ugly breach of social protocol."

To bolster his fuzzy reasoning Eli takes off on bizarre tangents. Just as we fail to openly confront race, he writes, a lack of meaningful dialogue about sex has made many of us so confused that "we could hardly open our mouths to kiss." (Does kissing on the lips count?) He makes the obligatory reference to the shootings at Littleton but only to condemn — and then acquit — whiney, white heterosexual males. In true wishy-washy — oops, I mean "fair and "responsible" — fashion, he condemns the "knee-jerk rhetoric from the left and right" that prevents society from engaging in meaningful dialogue about race and sex. "Speak of the devil and he will appear," Eli sagely observes; such thinking, he says, has made us "mum and stupid" on the topic of racism and unable to think about our differences more deeply.

Since Eli fails to mention history, economics, language, culture or any other factors that contribute to our "differences," it appears as if, in his mind, to think "deeply" about race means to be able to say, without fear or guilt, that Indians are red, blacks are black and whites are white, and that getting all hot and bothered about interracial sex is taboo. Or not taboo. Or something.

After much gibberish, Eli's bottom line turns out to be standard neo-con fare. From innumerable instances of racial intolerance, he chose to cite as an example a company, Crayola, that actually tried to do the right thing. "Indian Red," after all, is at least as offensive as "Negro Brown," "Chinese Yellow" or "Aryan White." I don't see those crayons anywhere.

Eli's muddled thoughts are what passes for insightful dialogue about race in today's corporate media, which now means almost all media. Welcome to the new, neo-conservative *Valley Advocate*. Bending the neo-con party line into an appearance of "alternative" thought is bound to lead to some tortured prose. That task has fallen to the hapless Quinn Eli.

Sonnet for Media Dog

The dog is feeling, in extremis, sorry, for himself he be.
The foul, vulgar world, desireth he to help,
But blather in much measure, bizzaros make him yelp,
And waste the daffy fools, on reams of processed trees.
The pudgy king of clubland; o slipp'ry ethics foul!
The pudding head regime, cloned they from Cotton Mather,
Higgins, Long, Feiden, Fine; a foul spawn doth gather,
Dark despair; tosseth in, say, the towel?
Ay, but in the hour of worm in tekka maki,
Absorbeth, on the caged lark's gilded floor,
The news! The news! Fit for naught but as before;
Then flee not, dog, to oceans blue or mountains rocky.
With turkeys soareth, lampreys swimeth, walketh with the swine;
Look about ye, ha! Addled dog, much work is thine!





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SPAZMO!

By now Northampton residents have decided who to put on the final ballot in November, be it the hand-picked successor to Big Mommy, the homeless guy with tattoos on his knuckles, the flabby homophobe, the Libertarian, or the two guys whom I can't think of pithy epithets for.

I'd have voted for the Libertarian for what he was saying about stopping the harassment of street musicians, but I find Libertarians tend to be closet gun nuts, conspiracy theorists, or potheads. So then I was leaning towards the homeless guy, who's been off the sauce FIVE WHOLE YEARS! Shine that badge of honor and let it gleam, buddy! With credentials like that you should be aiming higher, like mayor of Holyoke.

In the end, I preferred not to vote, but rather to wait and see what monstrous stupidity the residents of the city we call Paradise would heap on themselves this time. Maybe they'll feel inspired, and while they're in the voting booth decide to spontaneously approve gold-plated siding for the high school. We can never spend too much on our children's education, after all, particularly when it also gets to benefit our friends in building contracting to boot!

[Newsflash: so it looks like it's going to be Mommy Jr. vs. Rush Jr. Oh, joy. I'll be just SO excited about the inevitable referendum on lesbian sex that this is going to turn into. Yawn.]

Underwhelmed by the election prospects, I went out to buy some pornography instead. After all, that's my patriotic duty, too.

As is my habit when feeling p-r-a-p-i-c, I picked up a copy of *Cosmopolitan*. It gives me a certain thrill to buy such unwrapped, over-the-

counter porn, particularly at my local convenience store, which has one of those annoying "NO PORNOGRAPHY SOLD HERE" signs. Somebody somewhere's been watching too many 700 Clubs, I think.

The sign makes me want to grab the pimply clerk by the scruff and shout, "Oh yeah, Ace? Get a gander at this! Look, a forest of nipples peeking out 70's Tijuana-hooker tube tops!"

Bringing *Cosmo* home to your bachelor pad is almost like hiring an escort service, but cheaper. It certainly smells the same, and pausing to tear out some of the choking perfume inserts, I gathered up my glossy gal and sojourned for some quiet personal time in the bathroom.

Good Lordy Lou! I've always appreciated the smuttiness of this mag, but this latest issue was almost too much for my senses to handle. Maybe I'm just showing my age again, like a tumor peeking from under my shirt, but it seems that rag has gotten much sleazier in recent years, and this last issue was a surprise.

I've known for a while that the advice columnists were keen on getting their readership hitched, but it seems they've skipped the middle man and gone straight to the sack. There doesn't seem to be much other that the readers care to know than how to impress their men in bed, whether it's using a scrunchie as a fellatio tool, or wrapping their boobs up with duct tape (where are you when we need you, Red Green?), these ladies are intent on outdoing each other in the Slutmaster Olympics, apparently. My only question is, where's the Olympic Village?

My favorite article was the "Kama Sutra 2," a collection of "new" sex positions, some which looked pretty damned familiar, and some which made my hip hurt to look at. Winning name:

"The Backstairs Boogie," which doesn't look ergonomic at all, and would kill my knees. I enjoy these sex position manuals for the non-sexual details. For those of you only familiar with the frighteningly hairy first edition of *The Joy of Sex*, (where did they get those people? A Greek penal colony?), later sex position books became fairly minimalistic, kind of like a porno magazine designed by Channing L. Bete. So, because the people are fairly undefined, I started noticing the kind of furniture that was necessary for the funnest fornication.

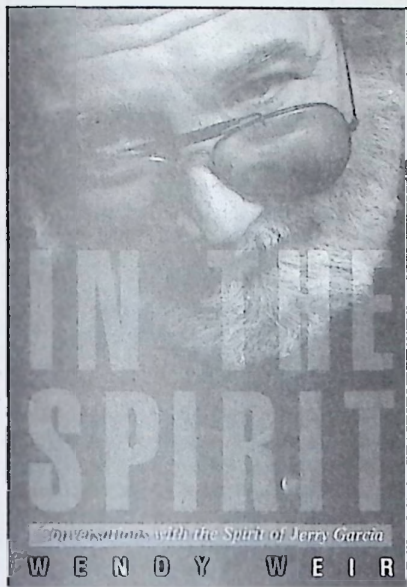
My favorite was the sex position section of this "men's health" book they gave us in college in the 80's. Fairly mannequin-looking folks copulated in a number of styles. When an adjustment of surface level was needed, however, the illustrator never showed a bed or a chair. Instead he just drew this large, featureless cube.

I became fascinated with this Sex Cube. Where could I get a Sex Cube? I'd never seen one in the furniture department of Sears. Did it come in different sizes? And what was it made of? Was it soft? Did it have a texture? Was it filled with foam, or sand, or little beads? Or was it, more likely, a hard Sex Cube (or perhaps it was only when you wanted a Cube for Hard Sex)? I imagined it would be covered in linoleum tiles, so it would be easy to keep clean.

The *Cosmo* spread features little furniture (I'm not sure if stairs count as furniture), but it does feature what looks like one of those folding foam traveler's couches, identifying the target audience as college students.

Well, I'm done. I guess I'll read the interview with Kevin Bacon. Though maybe I shouldn't admit to liking Kevin Bacon. Some people could misinterpret, and Tony Long might be out driving. My life wouldn't be worth a plugged nickel.

good reads



In The Spirit Conversations with the Spirit of Jerry Garcia by Wendy Weir

Harmony Books
\$24.00

Alright. It is clearly the middle of the night.

I have clearly spent the last couple of hours at NoHo's WWII club. I am clearly drunk. (I guess that I'm just trying to set the stage for my current frame of mind, or maybe simply make an excuse for the following paragraphs.) Wendy Weir, Bob Weir's sister, has been channeling the spirit of Jerry Garcia for the last few years. Now, of course, she has written a book. Having read this piece of "literature" I must say that Wendy is sincere. I must also say that she is about as kooky as it gets. I don't care what psychic phenomenon you, the residents of this Happy Valley, believe in. I think that dear Wendy has a serious screw loose, but that's... OK. The book is interesting and entertaining regardless. I swear (on Jerry's Over-Soul).

Shortly after Jerry's death, Bob asked Wendy to contact him on the astral plane. She did so and thus begins the tale before us. The book deals with the conversations between

Jerry's Over-Soul and Wendy, as well as dearest Wendy's spiritual journeys in general. I don't want to blow the suspense for anyone, but apparently Jerry in the afterlife is much like Buddha or Jesus or any of those other cool dead people. Peace, love, understanding... well, I think you get the idea. To tell the truth, Wendy is the interesting one here. She has a definite authority concerning the printed word; she is co-author, with her brother Bob, of two... yes, count them, two children's books. Her proven, at least to me, psychic abilities add to the uniqueness of this endeavor. Yes, she may very well be the guru I have been waiting for all of my pathetic and insincere life.

It took many years for Wendy to acknowledge her gifts. I won't ruin the book for any of you, but must point out some of the highlights. For example, shortly after her, and Bob's, parents died, she knew the old folks were happy. And how about the time Bob's deceased dog came to her in spirit and ordered her to paint it's portrait? At first she refused, but the ghost-dog harassed her for months until she fulfilled it's needs from beyond the grave. I know, I know, there are some doubters out there, but you are fools. How about when she had been in contact with Jerry's Over-Soul for a while and it told her to tell Bob that he needed to play his music at a higher frequency and drink more mineral water? Now do you realize the error of your overly jaded ways? This is clearly a message that could only have come from a higher astral plane. Not convinced? What if Jerry told Wendy that the surviving members of The Grateful Dead should continue to play music? That is what he told Wendy, in fact. Yes, if these huge money-makers were thinking of packing it in, they would have made a horrible mistake. Trust in Jerry's message. Trust, as well, in the holy ticket price.

Here is the basic message: 1) Life is eternal. 2) Energy is life. 3) Energy is eternal. Freakin' wow. This stuff is so deep I can see Australia. Speaking of which, Wendy and Bob went down under to research Aborigines for their second book and now Wendy walks the Earth partially in

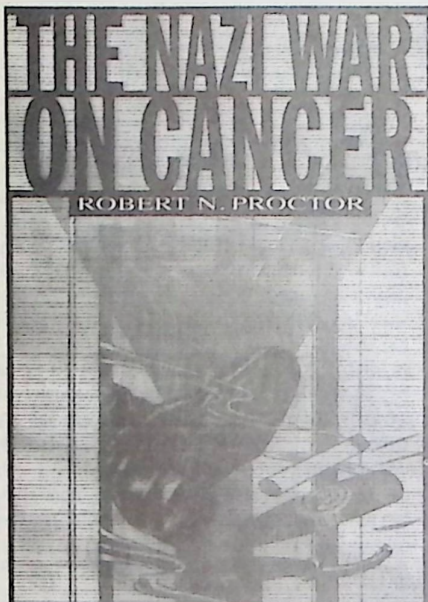
the spirit world. However, I think my favorite part of the book is when Wendy talks about her regression therapy and realizes that the reason she is shy is because when she was an infant... yea verily, an infant, someone thought about molesting her and she picked up on it psychically. Think of the damage that was caused by this psychic molestation. Her strength and fortitude amazes me. What a cross to bear. Is that a mixed metaphor? If it is, then it must be OK because in this hodgepodge of New Age, eastern philosophy, and whatever else could be thrown in, all traditions are equally welcomed and respected. Hold on. Let me go somewhere else. You may be asking how Wendy can contact the dead. The answer, my friend, is via meditation. IF A PERSON MEDITATES ON A HIGH ENOUGH FREQUENCY, THEN THEY CAN BE IN COMMUNION WITH THESE SUPERIOR ENTITIES. This is not, however, for the weak or faint of heart. Wendy describes for us how, her first attempt at spiritual communion, she was vibrating too low and thus a hoard of pirate spirits almost got her, so beware ye mates.

The main drama in the book is between Wendy and Jerry's Over-Soul attempting to free Jerry's mortal spirit from the low astral plane it is trapped on. This doesn't work until the surviving members of The Grateful Dead perform together as The Other Ones. Wendy uses the energy of the crowd to thrust Jerry's spirit free of his bonds. It fails. Then she combines it with the music and the band member's energy and thrusts Jerry free and into eternal bliss. "Thanks, my little sister." Yeah, cool. In the pages in-between, she encounters malignant wolf spirits protecting Bob, learns how to summon her own wolf spirits, masters the ever-after, studies the arcane, deals with her "problems," and does lots of other mysterious stuff. She also lets us all know that she has never done drugs. Uh-huh.

I think Jerry's spirit said it best in their first posthumous conversation, when he said, "I... can't... talk... to... you."

- Duke Aaron
Il Duce

good reads



The Nazi War On Cancer

Robert N. Proctor

Princeton University Press

\$29.95 / 365 pages

Hitler was a public health advocate.

Nazi Germany broke new ground and made important strides in areas of cancer research, work-place health and safety, and public health policy. Huh? What? I for one must say from the get-go, that it is incredibly difficult to discuss this book without visions of my distant relatives, roasting before my eyes. Luckily, Proctor is able to couch this historic material in such a way that it is both sensitive to the victims of the Nazis and an intelligent look at historically overlooked medical science from Germany's darkest period. In fact, he at times goes overboard, practically apologizing for his research and this interesting, and very legitimate, work in the history of science. Well, saying nice things about Nazis would make anyone doubt themselves, right?

While doing research for his book, *Racial Hygiene: Medicine Under the Nazis*, Proctor, a professor of the History of Science at Penn State, uncovered documents that showed Hitler's Germany was decades ahead of the

world in promoting progressive and socially responsible health reforms. They were the first to show links between smoking and lung cancer, did ground-breaking work in discovering cancer-causing agents in manufacturing (especially dye, asbestos, radon, and dust), and set about to promote a national standard of public health that would make the veg-o-matic guy on TV drool in euphoric pleasure. Proctor is an historian with the unique credentials to cover this material. He is author of the afore-mentioned work on Nazi medical atrocities, *Cancer Wars: How Politics Shapes What We Know and Don't Know About Cancer*, and *Value-Free Science? Purity and Power in Modern Knowledge*. With his credentials and sensitive delivery of the material in *The Nazi War On Cancer*, his many apologies for this book are unfortunate and take away from the very interesting subject matter.

The book is broken down into several distinct topics, with each one covering a particular area of Nazi cancer research and/or public policy. It opens with the ground-breaking work of German scientists looking towards mass health screenings of the population. Linking with government agencies they bombarded the population with educational ads (many of which are reproduced in the book) and information, urging people to have regular check-ups and to look towards early detection as the best way to fight cancer. (Early detection and mass screenings are still the most effective methods in fighting cancer and are staples of American cancer policy, both within the medical community and our government health agencies.) Easing from this subject into the next shows how thoughtfully produced this work is. The Nazis began to expunge Jewish scientists and medical researchers. They used national cancer registries as a method of medical surveillance of the population and this helped, minutely, in the weeding out of social undesirables (we all know who the Nazis considered as socially undesirable). The Nazis were also able to use the metaphor of cancer as anti-propaganda in respect to these same people. An example of this would be, "The Jews are a cancer in the Aryan nation," or something like that. Research into the use of radiation, mostly x-ray, was conducted in the hopes of eventually using these new technologies and methods to cure the Germans of cancer as well as tools of sterilization for the rest of us.

One of the most important areas of research was in occupational carcinogenesis. Brilliant work was done in many avenues. It was discovered that x-ray techs were contracting cancer at horrible rates and the link between the two was uncovered. In a related field, radium and uranium miners were high cancer risks and links were solidly established by German scientists proving that radiation could and did cause various types of cancer. Until this point, many doctors and researchers around the world thought that radiation treatments were going to be the cure-all from of almost every affliction known. During this time German scientists were uncovering facts that citizens working in specific industries were contracting cancer at rates many times the population at large; people that worked with arsenic, chromium, quartz, and other materials that caused minute dust particles in the workplace were shown to be at fault. The chemical industry was found to have similar cancer rates and the Nazis were the first to show that asbestos was in fact a cancer-causing agent. Hitler and the Reich Health Ministry set about expanding work-place safety and improving compensation laws for German workers. The government program was aggressive, far-reaching, and way ahead of the rest of Europe and the U.S.

The Reich Health Ministry took on German big business interests in many areas. They promoted the use of whole foods, started anti-alcohol campaigns, promoted daily exercise and vegetarianism, and fought difficult, long-term, and costly battles against the use of coloring agents in food-stuffs (especially the dreaded butter-yellow). Ground-breaking work was commissioned in the use of performance-enhancing food and drugs, but all of this was still done in the context of Nazi ideology and methods. The prisoners at concentration camps grew medicinal herbs for the German population and were the test subjects for the most dangerous experiments. Proctor asks the difficult questions here. What is to be done about tainted science? What does it mean for us to recognize the advances made in light of the horrible methods used? He doesn't pretend to answer these questions, but does a great job by raising them. The most important area Proctor covers is around the battle between Nazi ideology and tobacco. The Nazi scientists showed the now well-known links between tobacco consump-



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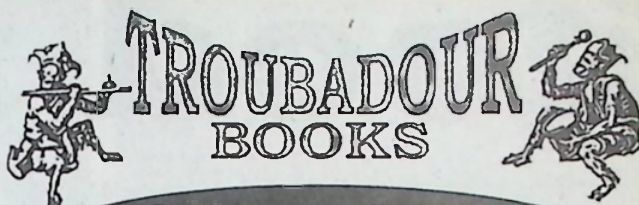
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tion and lung cancer and the German tobacco lobby and big money interests fought them every step of the way. The Nazis practically began the modern use of epidemiological studies and without question developed our modern models for medical history surveying techniques. The sale of tobacco products was outlawed for minors (as was Coca-Cola, by the way), and high taxes were levied on these same products. One of the most aggressive government-sponsored ad campaigns was mounted against the use of tobacco, and laws were passed in many regions and cities prohibiting the use of tobacco in restaurants, bars, and public buildings. A national institute was formed to do research on tobacco-related diseases (later implicated in bio-warfare research) and Hitler himself came out against the evils of smoke, drink, and bad diet.

There are questions around how much these public health policies actually did to slow down the growth of cancer rates and many efforts were curtailed because of the war. Procter lays the facts, science, and ideology out for us in a neat and enticing package that is readily accessible to the everyday reader. He doesn't shy away from the Nazis' manipulation of research to "prove" their crazy racial hygiene theories and their use of developing technology to kill and sterilize undesirables. All in all, this is a great book for readers interested in the history of science or the history of WWII and should provide some moral thought to modern scientific



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ic inquiry in respect the idiotic notion that science can be value-free. The parallels between Weimar-era Germany and America of today are many. Our government is becoming more intrusive in the lives of everyday citizens, protecting us from ourselves. There are huge questions around industry ownership of our political leaders. There are ideological battles being waged between progressive agendas and our duped, middle-class moralists. The difference is economic. What will happen if our economic pseudo-boom collapses? American military presence throughout the world often causes problems with allied governments and those opposed to us as well. We've been rocked by the most severe domestic terrorism in a life-time of memories. In many ways we are a nation poised on the brink of many ledges Germany faced in the early thirties. Luckily we know that America is so radically different that it could never happen here, or does the discovery that even the Nazis could produce beneficial science and public policy (that mirrors our own current national trends) send up a signal flare of warning?

- Duke Aaron
Il Duce

good reads

Crypto- zoology* A to Z

* Greek: *kryptos*, hidden • *zoon*, animal • *logia*, study

The Encyclopedia of
Loch Monsters, Sasquatch,
Chupacabras, and
Other Authentic Mysteries
of Nature

LOREN COLEMAN & JEROME CLARK

Cryptozoology A to Z

*The Encyclopedia of Loch
Monsters, Sasquatch,
Chupacabras, and Other
Authentic Mysteries
of Nature*

by Loren Coleman
& Jerome Clark

Fireside Books

\$13.00

Finally, a definitive work explaining my father's side of the family.

Kidding. *Cryptozoology A to Z* is an easy to read, intelligent, and sober documentation of over an hundred "natural" mysteries. I was hoping for a sensationalist work talking about giant Boogah monsters running off with all red-heads in Ottawa, but I'm sorry to report that Coleman and Clark are professional and scholarly. They have jumped to no conclusions, given varying explanations that are available, included documentation and eyewitness accounts, and even detailed the false sightings of mysterious

beasts and explained the science behind proving them false. The most important area this book deals with, however, is the creation of Cryptozoology as a legitimate field of inquiry. There was a time in the history of science that the odd, strange and unexplained would make a field scientist sell all of his worldly possessions to go in search of some beast. A quest for discovery, a search for truth, and a thirst for knowledge. Well, since our current establishment scientists no longer do anything along these lines, here comes Cryptozoology to the rescue.

The term was coined by famed writer and natural historian, Bernard Heuvelmans. (From the Greek: *kryptos*, hidden; *zoon*, animal; *logia*, study.) The study of hidden animals, including known animals that are thought to be extinct or are reported in locations that science has decreed they shouldn't be found. Makes sense. Why modern society has trouble believing that their are aspects of our planet still left undiscovered is probably a greater mystery than anything Heuvelmans researched.

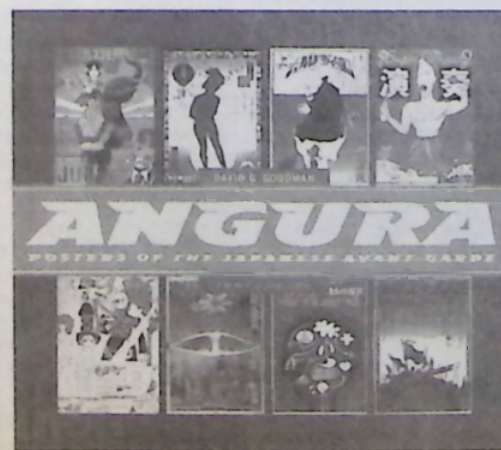
The book opens with an entry on the Abominable Snowman and ends with the Zuiyo-maru Monster. Within the pages in between are entries on the standards — Sasquatch, Yeti, and the Loch Ness Monster; many more from around the world, like the Hippo-hating Mokelembembe of central Africa; less known cryptids (the term for hidden animals) such as Montana's Flathead Lake

Monster; and short bios of the prominent explorers, authors, biologists, anthropologists, and cryptozoologists who have contributed to the field. Included is a cryptozoological timeline that spans from 1800 to present day, a list of cryptozoological periodicals and websites (English, French, Portuguese, and Swedish), and an extensive works cited/further reading list.

The interesting thing about Cryptozoology as a field is that once a creature has been "discovered" it is no longer a cryptid and enters into everyday science. Anyone ever hear of the Komodo Dragon or the Giant Panda? Former cryptids. How about the Mega-mouth Shark or Giant Turtle? Former Cryptids and in fact the turtles reside in a park lake in downtown Hanoi, Vietnam. No one knew, apart from local legends. Obviously there is a lot more we don't know about our little world. Hopefully, this wonderful book will inspire some young and intrepid child to grow up and search out more "new" animals/creatures. I can only hope they can find my Boogah monster, then bring me the red-heads.

Coleman and Clark have also joined forces before to co-write the 1978 book, *Creatures Of The Outer Edge*. Each has written many books solo as well. Mysteriously, both authors live in Maine!??

- Duke Aaron
Il Duce



Angura
*Posters of the
Japanese Avant-garde*
by David G. Goodman
Princeton Architectural Press
\$19.95 / 92 pages

Vacant Eden
*Roadside Treasures of
the Sonoran Desert*
by Abigail Gumbiner
and Carol Hayden
Balcony Press
\$23.50 / 96 pages



I wish this were a glossy magazine that we could run color plates in; that way we'd be able to reproduce some of the images, if not outright full pages, from these two remarkable recent releases from Princeton Architectural Press (of which Balcony is an imprint): remarkable because both books are a designer's feverish dream; of meta-design, actually, as both books are great designs of great designs; **Angura** of wild, lovely posters; **Vacant Eden** of stark Kubrickesque photographs. However, since this isn't (yet: my feverish dream) a glossy color magazine, you'll have to take my word for it.

First, some background. **Angura** is the term applied to the experimental Japanese theater troupes of the 1960's (angura = underground) which were heavily influenced by New Wave cinema and the strange startling butoh dance form, which in turn influenced performance and visual artists around the world. The sixty-five theater posters included here are groundbreaking works of art, both in terms of graphic design (juxtaposing commercial icons like the Beatles and coke bottles with pornography, psychedelia, and some truly fucked-up typography, both English and Japanese; all the more amazing considering these were the B.C. days; Before Computers) and printmaking (silk-screening up to twenty colors). Wow.

Vacant Eden is a different beast all together. If the **Angura**

poster artists were wild ones, these photographers were control freaks. It's what I fantasize a cross-country road trip with Stanley Kubrick would be like; with the mad genius stopping (I'd be the driver) to photograph every god-damned sweet dilapidated hard luck image of the southwest (no interstates on this trip; just the old forgotten highways): motel signs in innocent long-lost fonts that no retro-artist will ever capture the warmth of; of peeling, scabby, sun-scorched pool chairs; of wise, shadowy, peyote-armed cacti; of living ghosts one and all, all together disappearing into the, well, sunset. He'd take forever lining up his shot — shots— waiting, *patience*, *patience*, waiting for the lighting to be this side of perfection. That's what this book is like: Kubrick in my '72 Chevelle.

- Murphy

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SARA SHANDLER

Ophelia Speaks

by Sara Shandler

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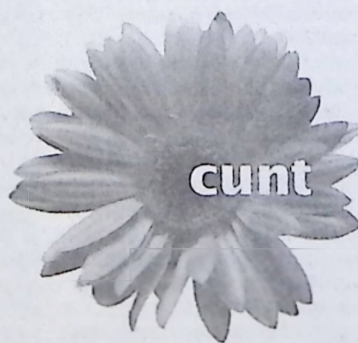
If ever you're feeling a little too happy, self-assured, or confident, just read a few pages of *Ophelia Speaks*. The book is by Amherst native Sara Shandler in response to the book *Reviving Ophelia*—a study into the experience of growing up a girl—written by psychologist and alas, adult, Mary Pipher. I was very interested in what this book had to say, being a teenage girl myself.

What it said was that being a girl sucks. Plain and simple. With each essay I read, my only response was "C'mon! Being a chick isn't THAT bad!" Not only was *Ophelia Speaks* the most depressing book I've ever read, but it was also one of the most one-sided. It showcases the darkest aspects of female adolescence in chapters entitled "Rape and Sexual Abuse," "Eating Disorders," "Seduced by Sex," "Self-Inflicted Wounds," and "When Friends Die." (There are 13 more fun-filled chapters, but I can't bear to go on.) The "happy" chapters? "Feminist Pride," "With the Support of Friends," and "Innocent Attractions." I'm not counting mixed sections like "Mothers," "Fathers," and "Questions of Faith."

The contributors are girls from all over the country, and the overall quality is only mediocre. Shandler prefaces each chapter with her own story about the particular subject; her obvious attempts at "I'm just like you!" were sometimes even more annoying than the contributions themselves.

I would have gladly read five essays on how magical prom night can be instead of a chapter like "Media-Fed Images." Give me some cheerful submissions on graduations and erase the section known as "Manipulated and Controlled." Life may not be a bowl of cherries, but it's not a bowl of... pits, either.

- Aundria Theocles



a declaration of independence

Cunt A Declaration of Independence

by Inga Muscio

Seal Press

\$14.95 • 288 Pages

When most of us women hear the word "cunt" we automatically switch into a defensive frame of mind. Whenever I have heard cunt vocalized it has always been as a derogatory term thrown at a woman with the intention of insulting her.

Inga Muscio has given us an amazing about-face on the use of cunt, transforming it back to its original meaning, as a symbol of empowerment, a woman's precious jewel; that all of us who possess cunts should be

overwhelmingly proud of.

In the first couple of chapters she relates her own journey through womanhood as she gets in touch with her body. Her musings on "the bleeding cunt" is a breakthrough in the appreciation of how cunts work and treats the bleeding as a celebration, not a frustration, and does so without being clinical. By personalizing her approach to the subject she genuinely relates to all women, rejoicing in this one thing that we all have in common, teaching us not to be ashamed. Ultimately, she takes the negative use of cunt back from men and gives it back to women in a positive way, and in so doing gives us control over the word and its existence within ourselves.

Cunt is an intelligent, creative and spiritual work, a book that every woman should read.

- Amy Neumuth

the perks of being a wallflower

The Perks of Being a Wallflower

by Stephen Chbosky

MTV/Pocket Books

\$12.00 • 213 pages

First impressions: MTV Books? The channel that contributed to the brain-rotting of a generation is into books now? What's next? McDonald's diet fries?

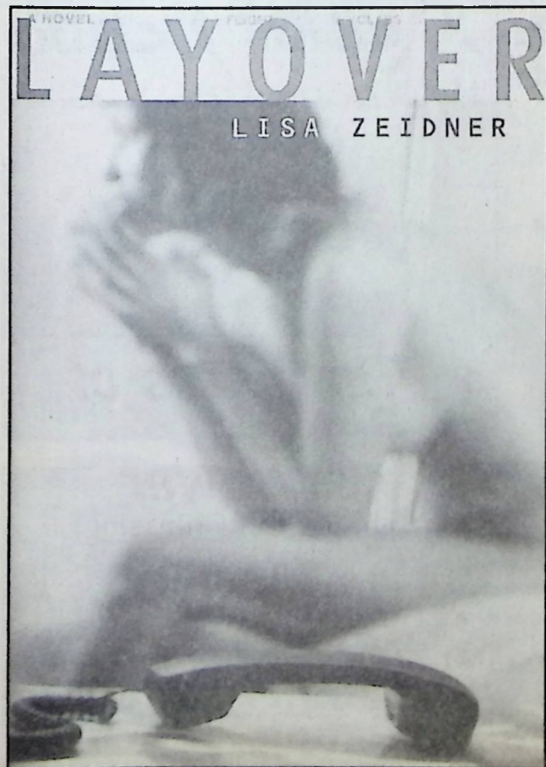
The Perks of Being a Wallflower is a novel consisting of a series of letters to an anonymous friend, written by Charlie — a boy fully immersed in his freshman year of high school. A year of his life is in these letters, in which Charlie details his exploits: from givens like falling in love, family struggles, and experimenting with drugs, but also experiences such as his first viewing of *The Rocky Horror Picture Show*, being taken under the wing of an English teacher, and the process of making the perfect mix tape.

Coming of age has been done before (see *Ophelia Speaks*), but the perspective of Charlie, a self-described "wallflower," is engaging and far from hackneyed. Through the course of the book, we see his gradual transition from wallflower to active participant: in family, love, and most importantly, in the course of his own life.

Charlie and *The Perks of Being a Wallflower* remind me of *The Catcher In The Rye* and its protagonist, Holden Caulfield. The young men live decades apart, yet their difficulties are essentially the same.

Whether you're currently going through The Land of Teenagerdom or already moved past it, *The Perks of Being a Wallflower* is a satisfying and entertaining read.

- Aundria Theocles



Layover

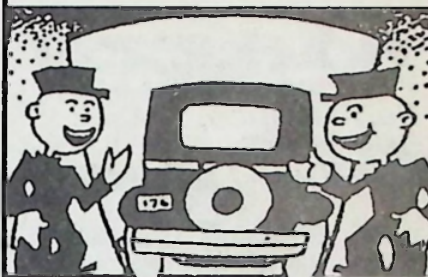
by Lisa Zeidner
Random House
\$24.00 • 272 pages

Here it is in a nutshell — it's an OK book. I am genuinely having a difficult time reviewing *Layover*, because I honestly did not feel strongly about it one way or the other. I was interested in it enough to keep reading, but I wasn't eagerly turning pages with anticipation either. Here is the plot: the main character, Claire, has lost a young son and around the same time she discovers her husband was unfaithful. She experiences a type of psychosis, and while on the road selling medical equipment, she decides not to return home for a while. New problems crop up during her travels, but she is also able to instigate a few adventures (including a few infidelities of her own!), all the while analyzing her previous and current situations.

What held my attention the most is that Claire is unpredictable — I kept reading to see what exactly she would do next, be it sleeping in a hotel room for days on end, or out trying desperately to connect with a stranger. Her many states of mind as she works through these situations are portrayed well, and I believe, accurately. Mostly she is in a state of deep depression, and has a sense of detachment about the outside world. Perhaps that's why I didn't feel enthusiastic about the book. Claire felt blah, and so did I. Despite this, it is certainly a well-written book; I think someone who has experienced these types of losses and situations may enjoy it more — they could perhaps better relate to all the emotions expressed in this novel.

- Andrea Carlin

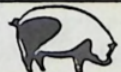
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Mezza Luna used to be located in a little shoebox on Center Street and served as a sort of Filene's Basement to Carmelina's: the same high quality food in a tiny and intimate BYOB setting for roughly half the price. Since relocating to Strong Avenue next to the Eastside Grill they've acquired the space to create the more elegant environment that the menu has always aspired to.

Two separate visits allowed a chance to sample several menu items. My tree-hugging companion took control of the vegetarian menu for me, while I sampled some of the heartier meat dishes. The pasta with gorgonzola sauce and roasted red peppers was not quite hot enough, but jazzed up with black pepper, came back strong. Pricy but nice. A more interesting choice was the Capricciose: penne with spinach, roasted red peppers in a tomato cream sauce: Excellent; hearty and worth it.

On the meatasaurus side of the menu, there are many choices. The seafood meals (not sampled) are of the exotic Italian variety, and unique in town. The chicken marsala was light on spice, but tasty nonetheless. Much more satisfying was the dish they (and Carmelina's) have made their name on — Crazy Alfredo. Juliennes of chicken breast, roasted red peppers, sweet Italian sausage and soppressata swim for their lives in a frothingly hot and spicy red alfredo sauce. Scaled from one-to-four (one is mild; four a nuclear meltdown only for the brave) this is the meal to investigate first. Try it at level two... just hot enough to invigorate your palate without bringing tears to the eyes.

Good bread plate, beer and wine, and pleasant surroundings make for a fun evening. The slow creep in prices of late brings them in the price range of other flagship restaurants in town, but this is one of the best Italian places around. Well worth the visit!

- Tony George

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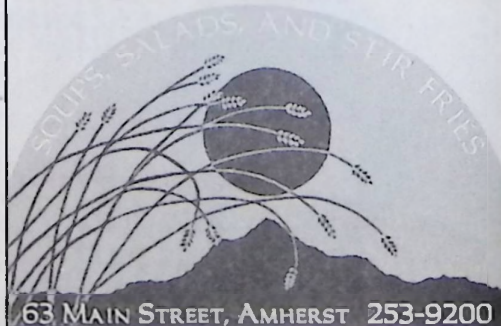
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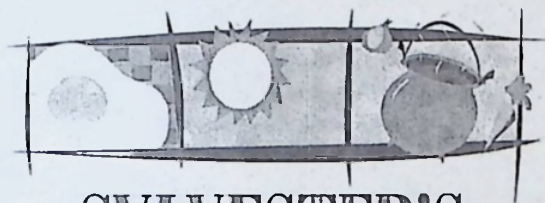
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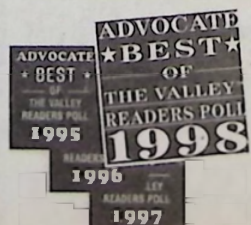
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WHITE OUT

A murder in Antarctica, apparently motiveless and opportunity-less, faces Marshal Carrie Stetko in *WHITE OUT*, by Greg Rucka, writer (author of the Attikus Kodiak private eye novels, *Finder* and *Smoker*) and Steve Leiber, artist. A second murder, a third, in a population of 400 internationals, builds relentless tension as Stetko dismisses, then reinvestigates all likely suspects and must begin the case again and again. A convincing South Polar setting and expressive, often harsh-lined illustration convey the claustrophobia and pressure under which Stetko labors. A convincing and plausible ending creates a satisfying drama in an unlikely locale.

A four-issue series (with a second 4-issue series slated for Feb. 2000) from Oni Press, 6336 SE Milwaukee Ave., Suite #30, Portland, OR 97202 / www.onipress.com.

MS. TREE

Suppose Mickey Spillane had chosen to write Mike Hammer as a woman — Hammer as the grandmother of hardass women — That's MS. TREE. Tough? She guns down Mafia bosses and laughs. Top cop tells her to give up her license or get into "treatment" and she tells her shrink, when he asks, "When—and why—did you halt your previous psychoanalysis?": "When? was when my previous analyst died. 'Why' was because I killed him."

Lucky, we were there when it happened. We know the shrink had it coming. We know a lot about her, Michael Tree: yeah, her father wanted a boy. "Some would say he damn near got one," she says. He was a tough-as-nails gumshoe himself. So was her husband, shot dead on their honeymoon, a mob hit that starts her one-woman war. She's got a son, Mike Jr., from Mike Sr.'s previous marriage. Their relationship softens her trench-coat/twin-gats-blazing public image; it's not an easy relationship; it's not easy knowing mom's got a high-number, personal "body count."

Mystery novelist Max Allan Collins and artist Terry Beatty create a noir, contemporary figure; believable, tough, smart, and suffering without complaint the paths she's chosen. Fifty issues from Renegade Press (collected into trade paperbacks) and nine issues from DC Comics available as back issues well worth seeking out.

MICKEY SPILLANE'S MIKE DANGER

Collins also created MICKEY SPILLANE'S MIKE DANGER, in which

Spillane's Mike Hammer/Mike Danger finds himself abruptly transplanted well into the 21st century of gleaming techotowers, air-cars, and a Betty Page look-alike hologram (named Holly Graham) as secretary and advisor. He's here in 2052 because Simon Holden, of the Holden holdings, needs a P.I. and in 2052, they don't exist: there's so little crime, the normal police force doesn't know how to handle it—and there's been a recent spate of murders.

Tongue-in-cheek jabs at the future, at hard-bitten detection, and at mass media make fast, light futuristic detective tales; all slickly illustrated by Edward Barreto and Steve Leialoha.

Eleven issues from Tekno Comics and ten issues from Big Entertainment, available as back issues from local comics shops.

SIREN

SIREN opens with a new case for Zara Rush: a missing teenager, a case made more difficult in that the boy sought is a shape-shifter. Rush has other cases to attend: police detective Nate Rush was her father, whose death left a lot of questions in the precinct house. Rush's world is one of super-heroes zipping by overhead "probably just on their way to stop another alien invasion," but leaving the street-crime behind and beneath them. Light-hearted, slick writing works smoothly with stylish art that's perfectly balanced between cartoon and realism, reflecting a sense of everyday police work in a town of the super-natural.

A three-issue series written by J. Torres, with art by Tim Levins (pencils) and Jeff Wasson (inks).

Available from Image Comics, 1440 N. Harbor Boulevard, Suite 305, Fullerton, CA 92835 / members.tripod.com/sirensca11.

—Matt Levin

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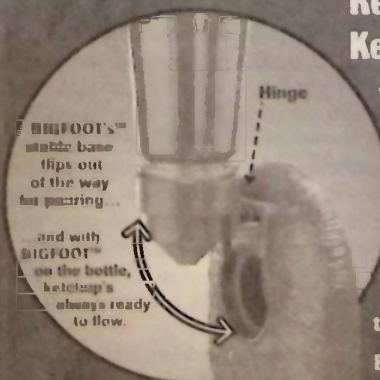
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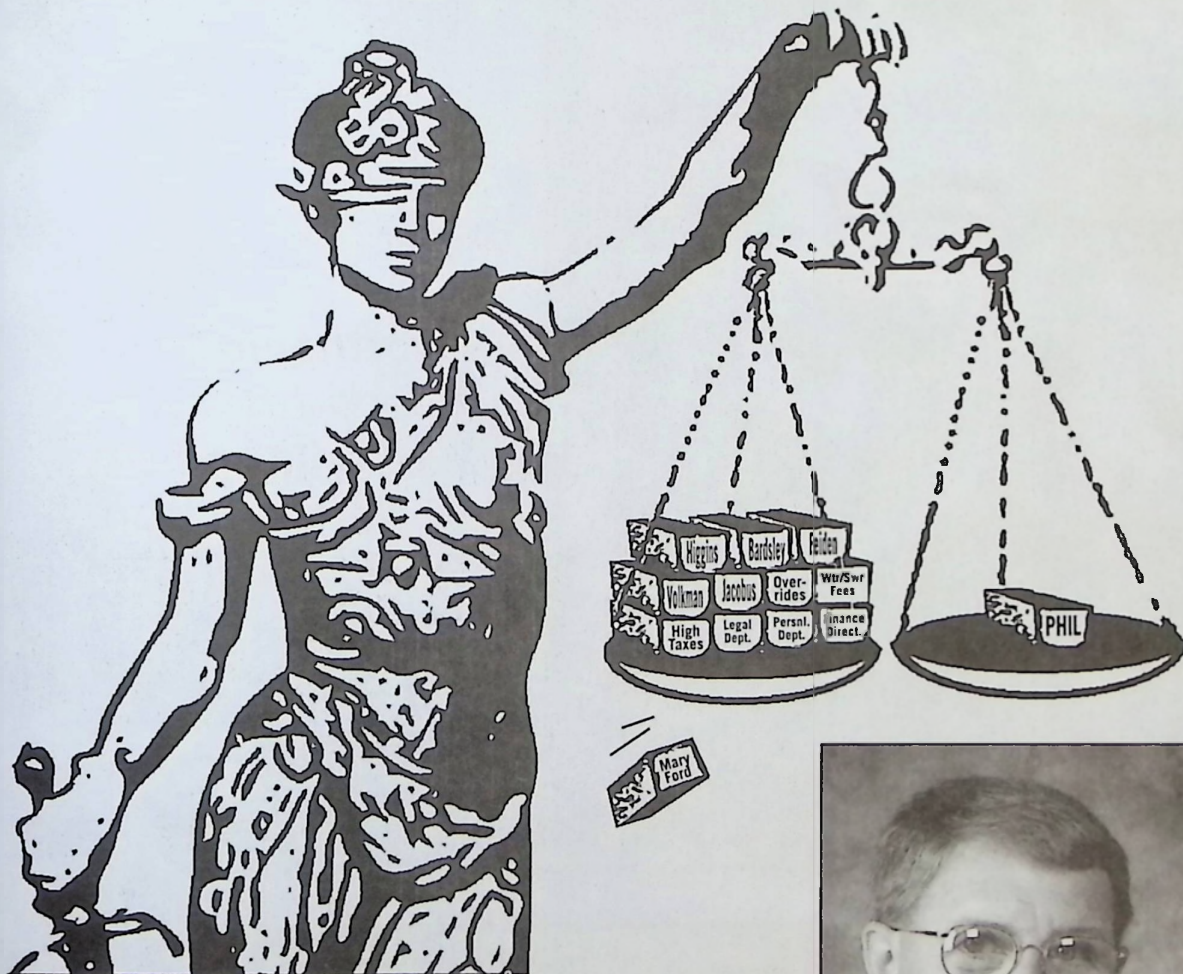
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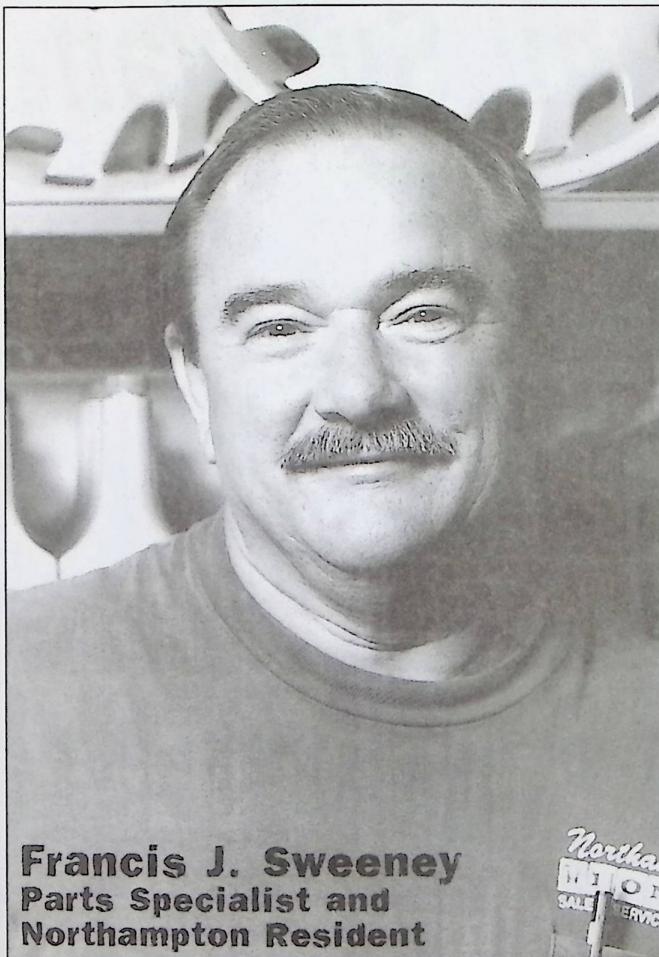


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